
Parental monitoring and their knowledge about the cyberbullying phenomenon among teenagers - Case study in the city of Durrës-

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INTRODUCTION

Young people are exposed to an increasingly open and collaborative online social culture, which allows them to access information and maintain friendships and relationships with family. There are also substantial educational and social benefits associated with engagement in online activities, such as creative content production, dissemination and consumption (Collin, Rahilly, Richardson, & Third, 2011). Young people are, however, at a dynamic stage of development in which risk-taking behaviours and immature decision making capacities can lead to negative outcomes (Viner, 2005). This is evident in the growing recognition and consequences of cyberbullying.

Concerns include, but are not limited to, easier access to child-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, Internet addiction, and online privacy (Livingstone et al., 2011). As primary caregivers and socialization agents, parents are encouraged to actively monitor and supervise children's Internet use (Ho and Zaccheus, 2012). However, it is not easy for parents to monitor and supervise today's tech-savvy children, whose Internet knowledge and skills often exceed those of their parents (Tripp,

2011). Moreover, Internet use is becoming more personal and mobile, making it harder for parents to know what their children do online (Clark, 2011).

Currently, school officials have difficulty figuring out how to intervene when they become aware of cyberbullying because this type of bullying often occurs off school grounds and outside of school time (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). An understanding of the nature of cyberbullying will help school officials to address this problem because more than half of the children and adolescents do not report incidents of cyberbullying to their parents or other adults.

The advent of the internet has made it more difficult for parents to monitor their children's interactions with others (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). In the past, parents would know who their child was talking to or with whom they were spending time. This has become more difficult with the increased use of instant messaging, email, and social networking.

Social networking websites are wildly popular and play an important role in adolescent socialization. Adolescents are communicating through these social networking websites rather than through landline telephones.

However, parents' perceptions and awareness of what happens on social networking sites is fairly limited (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), which was also an assumption of the present study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study analyzes the attitudes and perceptions of the parents in the city of Durres on cyberbullying and how they see their responsibility for preventing this phenomenon. Parent reports about some of the forms of surveillance / monitoring they use with children while they are using the Internet.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study was the qualitative method. Review of literature, qualitative data collection method through semi-structured interview with parents of children studying in the secondary schools of the city of Durres was applied. This study included 13 parents (5 men and 8 women). In regard to the educational level of the parents: 1 parent was with university degree, 6 with secondary education and 6 with elementary education. The interview was focused on issues pertaining parents' perception of cyberbullying, how they talk to their children about this phenomenon and how dangerous they perceive this phenomenon is. Parents also discussed about the forms and techniques they use with their children in preventing such phenomenon happening. The interviews lasted in average 30-45 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the transcripts of the interviews in this study. The main features of the thematic analysis make it appropriate for the fact that it is not based on specialized procedures of other quality assurance tools, and can be applied to theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is generally considered to be bullying using technology such as the Internet and mobile phones (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russel, and Tippett 2008). Cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon compared to traditional physical and verbal bullying in school hallways and playground. However, cyberbullying poses many of the same risks for its victims as do traditional forms of bullying. Cyberbullying takes a number of forms, such as sending insulting, rude or threatening messages, spreading rumours, revealing personal information, publishing embarrassing

pictures, or exclusion from online communication. Similar to traditional bullying, cyberbullying or online bullying as it is sometimes referred to, is an “intentional act(s) of aggression-or intentional act(s) causing harm toward someone else” (Wade & Beran, 2011).

Direct cyberbullying occurs when a message, such as an insulting text message or email, is sent from the bully to the victim. Indirect cyberbullying is the most common form of cyberbullying and most frequently involves the circulation of gossip or the sharing of private and personal emails, pictures and text-messaging (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in several ways. First, a single upload of humiliating visual material to the internet is tantamount to repetition as the content can be permanent and available to a wide audience (Heirman and Walrave 2008). By its nature, cyberbullying can occur through a variety of electronic sources such as e-mail, cell phones and online social communities whereas traditional bullying is limited to face-to-face interactions.

Second, power imbalance in cyberbullying can be expressed through (a) technological knowledge, (b) anonymity, (c) limited option of escape. Specifically, a perpetrator dominates a victim through greater knowledge of use of the internet and mobile phones and through the victim’s limited possibilities of defense (not necessarily knowing the bully). Moreover, unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is not limited in time and space (Heirman and Walrave 2008).

Cyberbullying behavior can be organized into seven different categories: flaming, online harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, outing and exclusion (Li, 2007).

Impact of cyberbullying

As the internet has become more popular with the youth, the potential benefits and risks of the internet to adolescent mental health are being increasingly recognized (Ybarra et al., 2007).

Being a victim of cyberbullying has been identified as an additional risk factor for the development of depressive symptoms (Perren, Dooley, Shaw, and Cross 2010; Juvonen and Gross 2008) and of psychosomatic symptoms like headaches, abdominal pain and sleeplessness (Sourander et al. 2010). Research has also found that involvement in cyber-bullying as a perpetrator was related to higher levels of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among 10-16 year olds (Hinduja&Patchin, 2010). Moreover, adolescent victims of cyberbullying also engage in other types of problematic behavior, such as increased alcohol consumption, a tendency to smoke and poor school grades (Mitchell, Ybarra, and Finkelhor 2007). A meta-analysis of 131 studies found that stress and suicidal ideation were associated with cyber-victimization (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Research suggests that children who are victims of bullying behavior are nervous, easily intimidated and lack self-esteem (Kopasz&Smokowski, 2005). This connection between lower levels of self-esteem and victimization has also been made in cyberbullying research, demonstrating the likely connection between being the target of traditional bullying and being the victim of cyberbullying (Hinduja&Patchin, 2010).

Li (2007) found that many of the psychological characteristics of a cyberbully overlap with those of traditional bullying, and that an overwhelming majority of individuals who bullied in face-to-face situations also bullied in cyber or online situations.

In addition to higher levels of aggression, research on traditional bullying has also indicated that bullying behavior can be associated with positive attitudes relating to violence (Olweus, 2003). A child's propensity toward aggressive behavior

is directly linked to his or her experiences within the family and specifically within the parent-child relationship (Finkelhor et al., 2009);

For instance, a child who perceives his or her family to be unstructured and believes his or her parents are cold, disagreeable and rejecting are likely to be more aggressive than those who find their home environments to be warm, affectionate and accepting (Finkelhor et al., 2009)

Decrease in school performance is attributed to poorer concentration and increased frustrations owing to cyberbullying incidents (Patchin&Hinduja, 2006).

Studies look to psychological problems, such as, mood dysregulation or anxiety (Ybarra, 2004). Depression is often cited as a major result of cyberbullying and is seen as having a pervasive impact on a victim's life (Ybarra, 2004).

Parent supervision/monitoring

Parents' involvement in safe use of technology starts from a child's first use, and they are a critical part of ensuring their teenage children's responsible and safe use of online services as part of a whole-of-community response to cyberbullying.

Overall, today's parents are facing unique challenges that did not exist in the television era. Consequently, parents' perceptions of the Internet can be different from their perceptions of television. It is not easy for parents to be effectively engaged in parental mediation of children's Internet activities due to the unique nature of Internet use (Clark, 2011). Firstly, Internet use typically takes place using a personal computer or mobile device. The very nature of Internet use makes it relatively more difficult for parents to closely monitor children's Internet activities. In addition, commenting on Internet use requires understanding of the Internet. However, today's children are savvy Internet users with sophisticated Internet knowledge. If parents lack technical

knowledge of the Internet, it will be hard for them to effectively manage their children's Internet use.

As time spent online is considered as a risk factor for cyberbullying, parental restrictive mediation (which decreases the amount of time children spend online) was found to reduce cyberbullying risks (Rosen, Cheever, and Carrier 2008). Research has suggested that lower levels of parental involvement in child Internet access is related to increased risk of becoming a cyberbully (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Research has found that higher levels of parental warmth are negatively correlated with involvement in both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel 2009). Conversely, a poor parent-child relationship, which may indicate insufficient parental supervision, has been found to be associated with a higher risk of involvement in cyberbullying both as a perpetrator and as a victim (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004).

Livingstone (2008) defines three broad strategies in Internet protection: (1) *namely active* is when a parent talks to their child about media content while the child engages in it; (2) *restrictive* is when a parent sets rules that restrict things like time spent or location of use; and (3) *co-viewing* is when a parent is present while the child uses the internet (Livingstone, 2008). Valcke (2010) posits that parents must adopt both maternal and symbolic roles in order to raise children as responsible "cyber citizens". Maternal roles allow parents to let their children access the Internet and devices, but do not regulate their usage (e.g. placement of home computers: common area vs. bedrooms). Symbolic roles include establishing home Internet use rules and restrictions to create a responsible "cyber citizen" (e.g. education of the Internet through co-viewing restrictions, and Internet protection software).

Although most cyberbullying occurs outside of school (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008), research has suggested that

the precipitating event often occurs at school and leads to cyberbullying at home (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009).

Although statistics show that the use of the Internet by adults is high and continues to rise,³ McGrath (2009) suggested that young people use technology in a different way to adults—adult use tends to be for more practical or business purposes, whereas for young people, technology is a vital part of their social life and identity development.

Children and young people's perception of their parents' knowledge about new technology influences the level of acceptance and value that they place on the advice offered by parents regarding online safety. In one US study of almost 800 12–17 year olds, teenage children whose parents were Internet users considered their parents as a greater influence in online behaviors than those with parents who did not go online (Lenhart et al., 2011).

As part of their privacy policies, social networking sites such as Facebook,⁴ Twitter⁵ and YouTube⁶ specify that users must be at least 13 years old, a requirement of which parents may often be unaware. However, close to half of teenagers who use social networking sites admitted to lying about their age at one time or another so they could access a website or sign up for an account. It is worth noting that there is no onus on website operators to *verify* the age of users (Lenhart et al., 2011).

The minimum age stipulations are based on the requirements of the US Congress as set out in the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act*.⁷ The Act specifies that website operators must gain verifiable parental consent from parents prior to collecting any personal information from a child younger than 13 years old (O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011). As such, social networking sites such as Facebook avoid this requirement by setting a minimum age of use at 13 years old. O'Keeffe et al. (2011) have called for efforts for this age limit to be better

respected, and it is suggested that educating parents about this age limit may be one worthwhile step towards this.

Parental Perceptions of Cyberbullying

According to the New York Times article, parents feel that they have to become more technologically savvy in order to begin to learn how they can help their children (Hoffman, 2010). Many parents have turned to community lectures by psychologists, technology experts, and police in order to educate themselves on the basics of technology and cyberbullying (Hoffman, 2010).

The study found that more than half of parents set rules for their children about what they could do on the internet and how often they could use it (Dehue et al., 2008). Even though a majority of parents were found to set rules about their children's use of the internet, many of them were unaware of the cyberbullying that was occurring (Dehue et al., 2008).

In addition to parents, few school professionals have been found to be aware of cyberbullying among students (Beran& Li, 2005). Slovak and Singer (2011) attempted to look further into the perceptions of professionals at schools with regards to cyberbullying.

Ecological theory views the child as has having an "interlocking system" with the family, school, and government as reflected in social and economic policies (Schriver, 2011). This theory focuses on social connections between the individual and the community they are involved in (Berkes, 2008). Individuals are part of an interlocking or nested system that encompasses the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macro system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological theory who asserted that multiple embedded systems, which includes the peer, family, school, community and cultural environments, influence children's behavior. Children do not develop in isolation but instead are impacted by various interacting contexts (e.g., society, peers, family, etc.).Parents,

teachers, and peers are seen as potentially impacting a child's behavior, and in turn, are being impacted by the child in question. No one person or environmental context is regarded as causative; persons and contexts are seen as potential contributors to problematic behavior, and consequently are eligible for intervention.

Studies have consistently indicated that youth who are involved in school bullying tend to experience problems in other contexts, including in their families and neighborhoods (Swearer & Espelage, 2004).

Fortunately, the social-ecological framework implies that practitioners can intervene at various levels with any number of individuals.

The family system involves their influence on Internet behaviors (e.g., good or bad), what restrictions they have in place for the child, and conversations they have with the child about what is seen on the Internet. The school level involves what the school does to protect their students on the Internet, what rules they set, and what policies they advocate for. The government level involves larger, societal level policies put into place related to safe Internet usage, education on dangers, and protection from predators. Ecological theory also provides a framework for understanding adaptation to an environment, such as if a child were around other children that were messaging unknown people on a social media website, the child is likely to adapt their behaviors to prove that they fit into the group (Berkes, 2008).

DATA ANALYSIS

Parents' knowledge of Cyberbullying

When parents were asked what the meaning of the word Cyberbullying, only one of the parents interviewed had previous knowledge about it, 6 parents knew what bullying was

in general, but they did not know the form of Cyberbullying. After explaining to them what cyberbullying was, parents began to express what they use to know about using the internet, mobile phones, and provided some examples of such behavior. All parents mentioned the internet and in particular the social networking sites, whereby they think that their children could be more at risk. Parents have heard about bullying from television and media. 11 parents compared Cyberbullying with the phenomenon of "Blue Whale" and nine of them started talking to their children about the dangers that the Internet could bring after they heard about this. All of the issues the parents have been discussing with their children, have largely relied on the information they have received from the media. Their discussions have been sporadic prompted by the "Blue Whale" case that became media wide spread, but there is no good knowledge of this phenomenon by the parents themselves. Parents reported that access to technology is spreading more and more among younger ages, such suggesting that children are at risk of getting involved in cyberbullying at younger ages.

Parents have very little or no knowledge of the internet, which makes it difficult to have control over their children when they use the internet. The low level of information on technology and the internet use also makes the recognition of cyberbullying phenomenon difficult, superficial, and sometimes driven by sporadic situations. *"Children today are very advanced in technology and we cannot reach them."* Parents with lower levels of education had less knowledge on the use of technology and were much more interested in learning about it. They thought that as hard as they could try learning, they would find difficult to understand their children, being that according to them they consider them as *"experts"*

Perception of the risk of cyberbullying by parents is different and this is also related to the lack of information on the forms and consequences that cyberbullying causes. Only six out of eleven parents admitted that their children could be endangered by cyberbullying because they could not control them *"we do not have much information on technology and we do not know how to use smart phones or computers."* Four of the parents were confident that their kids did not have mobile phones and could not have access to the Internet or social networks, but this did not avoid the possibility of using peer smartphones at school. Parents also argue that cyberbullying could become not only more common but also more dangerous as their children grow. *"The more children grow, the more they risk making mistakes, meanwhile our control as parents reduce."* Puberty and adolescence are perceived as the age at which the risks increase and the nature of problems that the children may perpetuate becomes more serious. According to parents, the forms of involvement in cyberbullying vary according to the age of children, because as they grow they become more independent and such creates the possibility for them to make errors. Children's ability to be engaged or having access in computer and technology was considered to be affected by external factors. This may include external influences in children such as interactions with peers and siblings. Some parents mention peers as an important factor that influence over the use of the internet and social networks, as it comes as a requirement to be part of the group.

Generally, parents believe that if their children will be harassed or will have any kind of problem, they will discuss with them. On the other hand, they admit that this is an age when children have a greater attraction toward their peers, which also affects parent-child relationships. At this age, parent-child relationships lose intensity and the time they spend with each other diminishes. Five of the parents admitted

that they did not ask their children what they look at when they go to the internet centers and what they do when using mobile phones. Two of the parents reported that they did not think that children could have such problems. About 70% of the interviewed parents believed that even if their children will not talk to them, they would understand them because they would react differently from the daily routine.

Generally, parents have built some expectations about how the relationship will be with their children and what they will do step by step to understand different situations in which their children are. This leads to paying no attention to other signals that children could give, beyond what parents expect to see when their children are facing problems. The classic form of reporting problems from children to parents seems to be what parents are expecting to happen more.

Parents report various types of damage that cyberbullying may bring: 10 parents believed that if their child could be affected by cyberbullying, they will show signs of stress, will not eat their food as usual, will speak less or share less information with them, will get less out of the house, will be aggressive or will show signs of irritation. 2 parents expressed that depression is inevitable. One parent expressed that suicide could be one of the biggest damages that cyberbullying can cause. About 70% of parents admitted that they are unprepared to react to such situations. They do not even know where to ask for help in case their children will be involved in such a risk. Parents with children at teen age feel more vulnerable when discussing about the risk that can come from cyberbullying.

Parents generally think that most of the cyberbullying harassment takes place outside school, "*cyberbullying occurs outside the school more than in the school environment,*" while others think that although cyberbullying can happen outside

the school, it can also transferred to school. The school should be prepared in identifying and managing such situations.

Different monitoring ways parents use to prevent cyberbullying.

About 40% of parents voice their concern that due insufficient incomes they are unable to pay the home internet which limits their children's access to the internet.

But on the other hand, 90% of parents accept the fact that in case their children wanted to get entertained or needed to work on school projects, they frequented internet coffees.

In most of the cases, the children weren't accompanied and were out of control when in internet coffees, which expose them to the risk of using even inappropriate web pages.

In some cases the youngsters preferred to lock their smartphones to prevent their parents to see and control their phones.

In almost 70% of the cases when teenagers were asked by their parents to see what they were navigating on the internet, they had refused to tell. Especially the parents have met the resistance of teenage girls.

None of the interviewed parents did have knowledge of applications or filters they could download on the PC or on smart phones to check or monitor their children's activity.

On the other hand some of the parent's limited ways of doing this were: taking away/hiding the phone or make the internet access inactive or allow limited access on the internet.

Some ways parents use for monitoring are especially physical monitoring, like being actively involved in their children's activities when they use internet or are physically present when children use the computer.

Generally, parents are not so sensible about their children's privacy which makes the communication with their

children difficult. Parents themselves think that breaking the privacy is very important to save their children or that they should know everything about them. In addition, they are confronted with their children's dire need for privacy which parents often disregard.

Other issues related to parenting styles were the tolerant parents. These parents are a key factor which contributes in increasing the risk that their kids may be involved in cyberbullying activities by attacking others. "An attentive and careful parent is alert on his kid signals, communicates systematically with him to learn about the changes that are happening in him".

All parents are aware of their kid's abilities on technology which on the other hand made it difficult for them to make use of technology to keep an eye on them. There is a gap, seen like this, between parents and kids with regard to using the computer, where some parents are unable or unconfident to supervise their kids. "*In some cases I find it difficult to work on the computer, my son helps me. He is very keen on computers*". Youngsters are supposed to have strong technical and computer skills in comparison to their parents.

The participants expressed that even if parents put limitations in the family, the kids will find a way out through friends at school. None of the interviewed did have any idea of how to stop their children or offer to them a safe internet use. They didn't even know about the services offered for online security. A few parents mentioned only the fact of limiting their children time access on the internet or allowing them to use smartphones only when they are grown-ups.

Parent role in preventing the Cyberbullying.

During all the interviewed cases, no parent admitted that his/her child was a victim of cyberbullying. The interviewed gave their ideas on how his /her child would feel if it was a

victim of cyberbullying and that he/she would not ask for help for the following reasons:

- Might be threatened or frightened
- Might be stressed or closed in him/herself
- Might not be confident or convinced that the parent/teacher would understand/believe or help
- May be feeling abandoned or neglected and not sure what door to knock on.

Parents are sure that their kids are unlikely to speak about cyberbullying because they could really feel frightened and threatened. Or on the other hand the children might think that this may be a reason to limit their access online. The parents need to know about alternative strategies to communicate with their children and that asking for help in this situation is crucial. They should tell their kids that there will be no online limited access even if cyberbullying occurs. And on the other hand whatever threatening might be, they should be addressed by parents.

70% of the parents admitted to be the only to solve their kids' problems if they became victims of cyberbullying. Two of the parents, stressed the idea that by keeping on asking the children what worries them or who threatens them- they will surely tell.

Later, when asked about the role of school in addressing the problem, 90% of the parents considered it extremely important especially if the child would be supported by the school psychologist.

Some of the parents needs related to cyberbullying were:

- The need for more information of how to deal with their children if they have such problems.
- The need for information of how to prevent cyberbullying and well management of internet

- The need for having this as a topic of discussion in the school meetings and a closer observation from the part of school teachers”.

With regard to children’s needs, the parents were unprepared to address because they were poorly informed. The parents consider the role of the school crucial for the education of the children on this phenomenon and for strengthening the parent’s role and their cooperation between each other.

The relation between parents and school is a critical aspect to address cyberbullying. Parents would like to cooperate with the school for the well education of their children and learning about strategies they might use for the education of their children on cyberbullying.

DISCUSSIONS

Parents lack information in regard to cyberbullying and this makes it difficult for them to understand what consequences this phenomenon causes on children. Parents set limits in regard to the time their children use when online, as a form to control or restrain their children from the risk that comes from using internet. Another concern that parents raise is their limited ability in using the computer compared to their children, which reduces their chances of supervising and understanding the risk in case cyberbullying occurs. These findings are also similar to other studies when parents set up rules over the use of the internet by their children, many of whom were unaware that cyberbullying was taking place (Dehue et al., 2008). Parents do not find it easy to be effective in parent-child mediation when related to online activities, due to the unique nature of internet usage (Clark, 2011).

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