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Traditional and Cyberbullying Victimization, Psychological Distress, and Perceived Social Support among Male Students: A Quantitative Study



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Abstract

Now a day, students in educational institutions often experience bullying as an important social problem which may affect the socio-psychological experiences as the spread of digital communication has extended bullying from face-to-face interactions to online environments. All these results in increasing overlap between traditional and cyberbullying. The present study explored the associations among traditional bullying, cyberbullying, psychological distress and perceived social support among university male students using a quantitative cross-sectional design. The data were collected from 99 male students. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The cyberbullying included various forms of online victimization. The traditional bullying represented physical, verbal and social/relational victimization whereas the psychological distress was examined by depression, anxiety and stress dimensions. Moreover, perceived social support was evaluated in relation to friends, family and significant others. The results showed a strong and positive association of traditional bullying with cyberbullying ($r = .668, p < .01$), with psychological distress ($r = .250, p < .05$) and perceived social support ($r = .516, p < .01$) whereas the Cyberbullying was correlated with psychological distress ($r = .234, p < .05$) and perceived social support ($r = .805, p < .01$). The study highlights that traditional and cyberbullying are interconnected forms of victimization. This victimization is closely linked with the psycho-social environment of students. The integrated institutional responses and strengthening accessible psychological and social support systems were highly recommended by the study to address both offline and online bullying.

Keywords: Traditional bullying, cyberbullying, psychological distress, social support, victimization

Introduction

Being a multidimensional social phenomenon, bullying involves repeated negative behavior toward people who face difficulty defending themselves. Traditional bullying represents physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion and relational manipulation. The cyberbullying is a harmful behavior using electronic communication and digital platforms (Olweus, 1993, 2013; Watts et al., 2017).

The expansion of digital communication has created The new opportunities for harassment, impersonation, humiliation, rumor spreading and other forms of online victimization are created by the expansion of digital communication. The cyberbullying continues beyond physical boundaries of educational institutions because digital communication can reach students at any time unlike many face-to-face incidents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Kowalski et al., 2014) and both should not necessarily be considered as completely separate phenomena as research highlights substantial overlap between them which suggests that students experiencing face-to-face victimization also face harassment through digital platforms (Modecki et al., 2014; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015).

Bullying victimization is also linked with psychological problems as shown by the previous studies which linked peer victimization with depression, anxiety, stress and other internalizing problems (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes et al., 2010). Social support is an another important dimension because family, friends and significant others provide emotional and practical resources for students facing stressful social situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Zimet et al., 1988).

Therefore, this research explores the relationships among traditional bullying, cyberbullying, psychological distress and perceived social support among male students focusing specifically on

the social and psychological dimensions of bullying victimization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Social Learning Theory, behaviour like bullying can be learned through observation, imitation, interaction and reinforcement (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, the aggressive behavior may be controlled and normalized within peer groups through giving attention, approval or insufficient sanctions. The bullying behavior can extend from face-to-face settings to digital environments because same peer associations and relationships may operate both offline and online (Salmivalli, 2010) and this perspective helps explaining expected relationship between traditional and cyberbullying. Apart from this, a useful framework for understanding the relationship between victimization and psychological distress is provided by the General Strain Theory as Agnew (1992) claimed that negative social experiences and the disruption of valued relationships can create strain. Moreover, the strain through humiliation, rejection, fear, social exclusion and threats to belonging can be produced by bullying. All these experiences may be linked with anxiety, depression and stress and stressful experiences can be copped with the resources provided by the Social support (Agnew, 1992; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

BULLYING, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

The physical, verbal and relational forms of victimization are included in Traditional bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1993) while harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and other forms of online abuse represent cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2017). A significant overlap is indicated by evidence between traditional and cyberbullying (Modecki et al., 2014; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015) suggesting that bullying should be examined as a broader social process rather than as isolated offline and online incidents.

Another important dimension of victimization is psychological distress as peer victimization has been associated with internalizing difficulties such as depression, anxiety and stress (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes et al., 2010) which are further contributed by cyberbullying because online victimization can extend beyond the immediate educational environment (Perren et al., 2010). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support explores family, friends and significant others as important source of support (Zimet et al., 1988). In this study, relationships between bullying and perceived social support were positive which suggests that students facing victimization may also perceive or seek greater support.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying.
- To examine the link between traditional bullying and psychological distress.
- To evaluate the association between cyberbullying and psychological distress.
- To identify the relationship between traditional bullying and perceived social support.
- To determine the relationship between cyberbullying and perceived social support.
- To know the association between psychological distress and perceived social support.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is significant association between traditional bullying with cyberbullying.
2. Traditional bullying is significantly related with psychological distress.
3. Cyberbullying is significantly linked with psychological distress.
4. Traditional bullying has a significant relationship with perceived social support.
5. Cyberbullying is significantly related with perceived social support.
6. Psychological distress has significantly association with perceived social support.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design consisting of 99 male respondents. Traditional bullying was assessed through physical, verbal and social/relational victimization based on the conceptualization of bullying developed by Olweus (1993) while cyberbullying was evaluated by items representing different forms of online victimization. Moreover, the psychological distress was measured using depression, anxiety and stress scale-21 (DASS-21) which assesses depression, anxiety and stress as related negative emotional states (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Antony et al., 1998).

Perceived social support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, covering family, friends and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). The data were analyzed on SPSS and Pearson's product-moment correlation was applied to examine relationships among traditional bullying, cyberbullying, psychological distress and perceived social support. Two-tailed significance tests were applied at the .05 and .01 levels.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1 Descriptive Characteristics of the Study Variables

No.	Study Variable	N	Role in the Study
1	Traditional Bullying	99	Main bullying-victimization variable
2	Cyberbullying	99	Digital bullying-victimization variable
3	Psychological Distress	99	Psychological outcome variable
4	Perceived Social Support	99	Social support variable

The four principal variables included in the analysis have been explained in the above table measured for the same 99 respondents. The traditional and cyberbullying represent the two forms of victimization. The psychological distress and perceived social support represent psychological and social dimensions of the study.

Table 2 Pearson Correlations among Traditional Bullying, Cyberbullying, Psychological Distress and Perceived Social Support

Variables	1	2	3	4
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1. Traditional Bullying	1	.668**	.250*	.516**
2. Cyberbullying	.668**	1	.234*	.805**
3. Psychological Distress	.250*	.234*	1	.377**
4. Perceived Social Support	.516**	.805**	.377**	1

*p < .05, **p < .01, two-tailed. N = 99.

This table highlights the central findings of the study. There is strong positive association of traditional bullying with cyberbullying $r = .668$, $p < .01$ which indicates considerable overlap between offline and online victimization and with psychological distress $r = .250$, $p < .05$.

The cyberbullying has association with psychological distress $r = .234$, $p < .05$ and with perceived social support $r = .516$, $p < .01$ showing a very strong positive association with perceived social support ($r = .805$, $p < .01$). Psychological distress has also significant association with perceived social support $r = .377$, $p < .01$.

Table 3 Summary of Statistical Relationships among Study Variables

No.	Relationship Examined	r	p-value	Strength	Result
1	Traditional Bullying–Cyberbullying	.668	< .01	Strong	Significant
2	Traditional Bullying–Psychological Distress	.250	< .05	Weak–moderate	Significant
3	Cyberbullying–Psychological Distress	.234	< .05	Weak	Significant
4	Traditional Bullying–Perceived Social Support	.516	< .01	Moderate–strong	Significant
5	Cyberbullying–Perceived Social Support	.805	< .01	Very strong	Significant
6	Psychological Distress–Perceived Social Support	.377	< .01	Moderate	Significant

Table # 3 reflects that the strongest association was between cyberbullying and perceived social support ($r = .805$). The traditional bullying and cyberbullying was ($r = .668$). There were comparatively weaker but statistically significant relationships of traditional bullying and cyberbullying with psychological distress.

Table # 4 Hypothesis Testing Based on Pearson Correlation Analysis

Hypothesis	Hypothesized Relationship	Statistical Result	Decision
H1	Traditional bullying is significantly associated with cyberbullying.	$r = .668$, $p < .01$	Supported
H2	Traditional bullying is significantly associated with psychological distress.	$r = .250$, $p < .05$	Supported

H3	Cyberbullying is significantly associated with psychological distress.	$r = .234, p < .05$	Supported
H4	Traditional bullying is significantly associated with perceived social support.	$r = .516, p < .01$	Supported
H5	Cyberbullying is significantly associated with perceived social support.	$r = .805, p < .01$	Supported
H6	Psychological distress is significantly associated with perceived social support.	$r = .377, p < .01$	Supported

Table # 4 reflects that all six hypotheses were supported as the result depicts statistical evidence of significant relationships between traditional bullying, cyberbullying, psychological distress and perceived social support among participants.

CONCLUSION

Findings of the study illustrate that traditional and cyberbullying have a significant relationship. The strong correlation between $r = .668$ is consistent with previous research indicating considerable overlap between offline and online victimization (Modecki et al., 2014; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Both traditional bullying and cyberbullying had significant association with psychological distress and they are consistent with previous research linking peer victimization with depression, anxiety, stress and other internalizing difficulties (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes et al., 2010). The bullying can be understood as a negative interpersonal experience capable of producing strain through humiliation, rejection, fear and social exclusion as explain by general strain theory (Agnew, 1992).

Sociologically, these findings are very important as bullying is rooted within peer relationships, group norms, social status, institutional practices and increasingly digital networks as suggested by the Social Learning Theory, peer behavior can be learned and reinforced when aggression is tolerated or rewarded (Bandura, 1986; Salmivalli, 2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The integrated policies addressing physical, verbal, relational and cyberbullying should be designed by the educational institutions.
2. For reporting bullying and cyberbullying, confidential and easily accessible mechanisms should be developed.
3. The students facing victimization and emotional distress should be provided counseling and psychological support.
4. There should be promoted positive peer relationships through mentoring, student societies and peer-support programs by institutions.
5. The cyber harassment, responsible online communication, privacy and reporting procedures should be managed through digital-safety education
6. The training to identify both visible and less visible forms of bullying should be given to Faculty and administrative staff.

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7. The larger samples and longitudinal designs should be used by future studies to clarify the relationships among bullying, psychological distress, and social support.

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