

Original Paper

The Prevalence of Cyberbullying among Adolescents: A Case Study of Middle Schools in Vietnam

To Phuong Oanh^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

* To Phuong Oanh, Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

Received: May 28, 2020

Accepted: June 7, 2021

Online Published: June 14, 2021

doi:10.22158/ct.v4n3p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/ct.v4n3p1>

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the prevalence of cyberbullying among Vietnamese adolescents. Special emphasis was placed on gender differences regarding different forms of cyberbullying and victimization. In this study, 200 middle school students from four state schools in Vietnam were online surveyed to obtain information about the prevalence of cyberbullying and victimization. The results show that most of the students used the Internet daily and that almost all of them possess mobile telephones. On average, 7% of students reported that they have cyberbullied others online, whilst 14% of them were victims of cyberbullying. The most common types of victimization reported by students were harassment including “prank or silent phone calls” or “Insults on instant messaging and website”. There were not any significant gender differences in cyberbullying and being victimized by cyberbullies than females.

Keywords

cyberbullying, Vietnam, victim, social work

1. Introduction

The range of definitions of cyberbullying proposed by researchers reflected a correlation between the development of technology and how cyberbullying behaviours have (Kowalski et al., 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Cyberbullying can occur via mobile phone developed include Internetmediated communications. Since 2003, tablets have also become popular when the term “Cyberbullying” was first proposed. “Cyberbullying” has been increasing with the use of technology, specifically electronic communication and social networking(Wright, 2018).

This phenomenon appeared only a few years ago as the use of electronic devices such as computers and mobile telephones by young people increased. The term “Cyberbullying” can be defined as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact,

repeatedly and overtime against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Slonje et al., 2013). Thus, cyberbullying is considered as a means of bullying in which peers use electronic devices “to taunt, insult, threaten, harass, and/or intimidate a peer” (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

Traditional cyberbullying is divided into physical (hitting, kicking), verbal (teasing, threatening) and indirect (social exclusion, spreading rumours). Cyberbullying can reach particularly large audiences in a peer group compared with the small groups who are the usual audience in traditional bullying. Compared with most traditional forms of bullying, the person carrying out cyberbullying may be less aware or even unaware of the consequences of his or her actions. That would be lack of opportunities for empathy or interventions. On the other hand, nasty text messages or email can be simply deleted and blocked. Moreover, cyberbullying doesn't cause physical harms. This could occur through different devices such as email, social networking, cellphone... Significantly, cyberbullies might conceal if they desire. Cyberbullying refers to bullying through technology like social networking, messages, email...

Existing surveys on the prevalence of cyberbullying show that it is common among adolescents in developed countries. Previous school or telephone surveys from the United States and the United Kingdom showed that the rates of being a victim of cyberbullying and being a cyberbully are in the range of 5% to 20%. In the US survey on Internet use among individuals aged 10 to 17 years, 12% reported being aggressive to someone online, 4% were targets of aggression, and 3% were both aggressors and targets (Sourander et al., 2010). Currently, the statistics are wide-ranging as to how often or how many children and adolescents are being bullied by a cyberbully. The Cyberbullying Research Center has most recently reported that about 20% of a randomly selected sample of 4,400 eleven to eighteen-year-olds in the United States report having been cyberbullies or cyber victims at least once in their lifetime ((Erdur-Baker, 2010). Numerous researchers have found that 20-40% of their middle school samples in the United States report being victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying in the last year or less (Pergolizzi et al., 2009).

The review of literature about cyberbullying, race/ethnicity and mental health outcomes mention that in 2013, nearly 20% of the youth in grades 9–12 in the US reported being traditionally bullied and almost 15 % reported being cyberbullied (Edwards et al., 2016). According to the Pew Research Center, 92% of children report going online daily, and 71% use more than one type of social media. Cyberbullying might be harmed by using technology and media.

In 2004, antibullying measures were proposed in the US House of Representatives to be included in the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, and all states currently have antibullying policies. Although the US Congress passed the Protecting Children in the 21st Century legislation in 2008, which also addresses cyberbullying, 21 not all states have updated their laws to include cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can be very emotionally damaging. Victims of cyberbullying may experience depression, isolation, poor academic performance, and even suicidal ideation. Furthermore, unlike traditional bullying, which children can typically escape once they return home from school, cyberbullying is

present wherever youth have a mobile device or an internet connection. The ever-present nature of cyberbullying can cause great anxiety among children and adolescents, as they may feel like they no longer have a safe haven. This anxiety, combined with the fact that cyberbullies often make harsher and more hurtful statements online than they would in person, makes cyberbullying a particularly destructive form of bullying.

The coronavirus pandemic is forcing people all over the world to practice social distancing and stay home and children are adjusting to e-learning. Some researchers have documented the effects of cyber victimization, which has been associated with academic and emotional problems, lowered self-esteem, lower psychological well-being, and lower perceptions of school safety (Devine & Lloyd, 2012). This study aims to explore the prevalence of cyberbullying among middle-school students during Covid-19 in students.

2. Method

2.1 Participants, Measures and Procedures

The online questionnaire was designed to include including Demographic Information, the Bullying & Cyberbullying Scale. All four schools were contacted and invited to participate in the current study by the research team with 200 students. The Demographic Information Sheet asked students for their age (in years), gender, grade and school. Data collected the information about frequency and types of Internet students have been using, their favour on Internet. Since then, the sheet asked students about cyberbullying (understanding and experiences). Data collection took place over approximately one week via Monkey. Students completed their questionnaires by choosing answers and tick on the box. They could move the other questions unless they finish the previous one. If a participant withdrew from the study during the period when he/she was completing the questionnaire, the information was deleted. The Bullying & Cyberbullying Scale, designed to be used with children, measures bullying & victimization behaviour among peers in or near the school. This scale consists of comparisons of behaviours associated with bullying and cyberbullying. While this scale was based on the Olweus' Bully & Victim questionnaire which has sufficient construct and discriminant validity (Solberg & Olweus, 2003), the specific validity and reliability for the current measure remain unknown (Smith et al., 2008). The entire scale was composed of 8 items, each of which has multiple responses from which the student can choose. This scale also has questions regarding internet usage, which include seven questions about the student's ability to use computers and how long they use the internet per week.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

This research received approval from Hanoi National University of Education Research Ethics Committee (HNUE-REC).

3. Result

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of students participating the study. Eligible participants were middle school students in Hanoi, Vietnam. As described below, we recruited 482 students including 47.72 % female (N=248) and 51.45 % male (N=230) and 1.24 % others (N=6). Specifically, we recruited participants from two state-owned public schools (School A and C) and two private schools (school B and D). Only school A (N=117) located in the suburb area while three others including school B (N=125), School C (N=128) and School D (N=112) located in the inner city. Students are from 9th grade (N=108), 8th grade (N=129), 7th grade (N=138) and 8th grade (N=107).

Table 1. Characteristics of Participating Schools and Participants

Characteristic		N=482	Percent (%)
School	Kim Tan	164	80.4
	Cam Linh	22	11
	Minh Quan	11	5.5
Grade	8th	119	59.5
	9th	81	40.5
Gender	Male	248	51.45
	Female	230	47.72
	Other	6	1.24
Age	13	8	33%
	14	126	63
	15	66	33

3.1. Usage of the Internet

The results revealed that 99% of students have used the Internet. More than half of students reported spending several times per week (64%). Other students reported spending several times on the internet per day (63 students; 31.5%). Other options were not using the Internet (0.5%), using one a day (0.5%) and 2.5% for once a week 1% for once a month.

Almost all students paid attention to online learning and sent or received emails. The average time on the Internet is 10 to 15 hours (72.5%) per week. When asked about the place they use the internet, most students used the Internet in their bedroom (97.9%). Others used the Internet at friend's house (17.1%); in Café Internet (9.3%) and at school (6.2%). Just a few students (2.1%) reported using the internet at relative's house.

A majority of students (93.5%) reported using social networking sites (such as Facebook, MySpace etc.) and sending or receiving emails. 91% of students used Instant messaging (messenger, Zalo, WeChat, Viber etc.). While over half use the internet for surfing the net (50.3%), just 27.1% of students reported using chat rooms. 81.4% of the students reported using the internet for school work or virtual learning (Zoom, Conference Call etc.) Additionally, the most favourite of students were downloading music, films or programs 80.9%), others loved playing game account for (30.2%) and online shopping (27.1%).

3.2. Victims of Cyberbullying

Among 200 students who answered the questionnaire, almost reported that they had never been cyberbullied, (86%) while 14% of students told that they had been suffered from cyberbullying. When asked about the period of time they have been cyberbullied, over half of the students (53.6%) reported that gone through within the last school year, 28.6% of students had experienced within last month, only 14.2% of them had been cyberbullied over one school year ago. And 3.6% of students dealt with this problem last week. Totally, there were 9 students who suffered from cyberbullying as survey results (Table 2).

Table 2. Period of Time Students Experienced Cyberbullying

	Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Within the last week	1	3,6
Within the last month	8	28,6
Within the last school year	15	53,6
Over one school year ago	4	14,2
Total (n=)	28	100

The differences in the forms of being cyberbullying experienced by middle school students are shown in Table 3. Half of the students who were victims of cyberbullying reported being cyberbullied through nasty text messages and plank or silent phone calls (50%) students being insulted on instant message (21.4%), few students reported being cyberbullied through a website (including Facebook, Myspace etc.) (10.7%) through rude or nasty emails (7.1%). No one is insulted by photos or videos.

Table 3. Victimization through Cyberbullying among Vietnamese Middle School Student

Form of cyberbullying	Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Through nasty text messages (making threats and comments)	14	50
Prank or silent phone calls	14	50
Insults on a website	3	10,7
Insults on Instant Messaging	6	21,4
Rude or nasty email	2	7,1

Survey also indicated students have shared with others (friends, family...) about their problems. Only a few of the students (4 students) haven't dared to express. This proves students are also brave to share and find solutions, not avoid problems. There was no significant gender difference was found in the rate of being cyberbullied.

3.3. Students Who Are Cyberbullies

Most students (92.5%) have never taken part in cyberbullying. Few of the students (7.5%) were cyberbullies. They could distinguish kindness and unkindness through cyberbullying. However, 7.5% of students who have taken part in cyberbullying were not sure that they haven't had any cognition about their behaviours. In terms of the period time of taking part in cyberbullying. Both male and female could take part in cyberbullying because of various reasons. Among students having to cyberbully, there was 9 female while six were male ones. The number of females has a little more than male in this case. When asking about the period of time students took part in cyberbullying, only 1 student refused to answer this question (Table 4). Most students participated in cyberbullying within the last school year (64.3%).

In terms of cyberbullying, the most popular was a prank or silent phone calls (40%). Therein, insulted someone on a website and on instant messaging are the second and third popular behaviours. Moreover, 20% (n=3) is the percentage of threatening text messages (making threats and comments) and insulted someone in a chat room.

Table 4. Period of Time Students Took Part in Cyberbullying

	Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Within the last week	2	14.3
Within the last month	2	14.3
This term	1	7.1
Within the last school year	9	64.3
Total	14	100

In terms of cyberbullying, the most popular was a prank or silent phone calls (40%). Therein, insulted someone on a website and on instant messaging are the second and third popular behaviours. Moreover, 20% of students had threatening text messages (making threats and comments) and insulted someone in a chat room (Table 5). There was no significant gender difference was found in the rate of having cyberbullying activities.

Table 5. Period of Time Students Took Part in Cyberbullying

	Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Threatening text messages (making threats and comments)	3	20
Prank or silent phone calls	6	40
Insulted someone on a website	5	33.3
Insulted someone on Instant Messaging	4	26.7
Insulted someone in a chat room	3	20

4. Discussion

This study investigated the prevalence of cyberbullying among Vietnamese adolescents, based on a survey of 200 students from four middle schools in Vietnam. Special emphasis was placed on the frequency of using the Internet, rate and different forms of cyberbullying and victimization.

First, we found that most students use the Internet on a daily basis and that almost all of the participants. This fact implies that Internet has become a part of the everyday lives of Vietnamese adolescents especially in the Covid_19 time, and therefore it can be expected that cyberbullying problems may occur. Several kinds of media they have used including Facebook, Zalo or social networking websites, and learning software like Zoom and emails. The results of this study have shown that the information technology in this region especially in Covid-19 time is sufficiently developed and accessible to young people. This prospect is emphasized by the fact that teachers and parents in Vietnam lack control over the children's activities, which eventually results in violence and victimization in cyberspace.

Second, the findings of the present study indicate that a significant number of Vietnamese students are involved in cyberbullying, either as a victim or a bully. About 7% of the participants reported that they were involved in cyberbullying, about 14% reported that they were victims of online bullying. The most common types of victimization reported by the students were "prank or silent phone calls" "Insults on instant messaging and website". These results regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying and victimization are in accordance with other studies conducted in other countries (Lee, 2017; Popović-Ćitić et al., 2011).

Third, in our study, gender was found to no significant role in identifying victims, however no difference in bullies. Although a number of a female having bullying seems higher than male students.

This is not consistent with previous research (Lee, 2017) which has shown that females are less likely to bully than males. From this study, the influence of gender on cyberbullying need further research.

In summary, cyberbullying is a problem for a significant number of students in Vietnam and it takes many different forms. Cyberbullying has increased very quickly and educators and researchers are understandably concerned that this problem is growing more rapidly than educators' and parents' ability to respond effectively. The study indicates that it is necessary to create a school-based comprehensive program to react to cyberbullying. It is important to provide adolescents with strategies that are effective, and this is particularly true for boys, as they are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying problems. In addition, it should be noted that male students are engaging in ineffective strategies in response to bullying and that they believe that these solutions are effective (Craig et al., 2007). The information obtained in this study can be used to provide a fuller picture of the issue of cyberbullying, which may be relevant for the successful planning of preventive programs. Therefore, we recommend "Cyberbullying: A prevention Curriculum" focus on together participations "Group social work". This is a program that deals with attitudes and behaviours associated with cyberbullying. It consists of an eight-session curriculum, with additional resources on a CD-ROM that reproducible parent resources, student fact sheets, program poster and student handouts, resources to address cyberbullying school-wide (school policies, legal concerns etc.), peer leader training materials, and a short training on cyberbullying for program facilitators. This is not a research-based program, but it is based on the latest research in prevention and on the topic of cyberbullying. Many of the lesson activities are patterned after prevention models that research has shown to be effective in decreasing negative student behaviour, and increasing student attitudes toward refraining from negative behaviours. These models include selecting and using peer leaders, providing parent-student activities, doing cooperative learning and project activities, and identifying the causes of why students behave as they do. The curriculum also recommends that schoolwide policies and procedures be implemented to effectively address cyberbullying in a broad way while establishing a climate that is conducive to positive interactions among students. The 8-session Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum is recommended to raise student and parent awareness of what cyberbullying is and why it is so harmful, equip students with the skills and resources to treat each other respectfully when using online tools, give students information about how to get help if they, or others they know, are being cyberbullied and teach them how to use technology in a positive way. Each session can be completed in fifty minutes and includes detailed instructions on presenting the information, activities to reinforce the key concepts, and reproducible student handouts.

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its findings and conclusions. Although the study encompassed schools from communities from different socio-demographic backgrounds, the fact remains that the data have been collected from an urban environment in Vietnam, the capital of Vietnam, and its surroundings; therefore, we must be cautious

when generalizing the findings to other regions of Vietnam and beyond. In addition, it is also important to examine cyberbullying at other age levels.

References

- Craig, W., Pepler, D., & Blais, J. (2007). Responding to bullying: What works? *School Psychology International*, 28(4), 465-477. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034307084136>
- Devine, P., & Lloyd, K. (2012). Internet Use and Psychological Well-being among 10-year-old and 11-year-old Children. *Child Care in Practice*, 18(1), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2011.621888>
- Edwards, L., Kontostathis, A. E., & Fisher, C. (2016). Cyberbullying, race/ethnicity and mental health outcomes: A review of the literature. *Media and Communication*, 4(3), 71-78. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i3.525>
- Erdur-Baker, Ö. (2010). Cyberbullying and its correlation to traditional bullying, gender and frequent and risky usage of internet-mediated communication tools. *New Media and Society*, 12(1), 109-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341260>
- Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>
- Lee, E. B. (2017). Cyberbullying: Prevalence and Predictors Among African American Young Adults. *Journal of Black Studies*, 48(1), 57-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934716678393>
- Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2015). Measuring cyberbullying: Implications for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 23, 69-74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.05.013>
- Pergolizzi, F., Richmond, D., Macario, S., Gan, Z., Richmond, C., & Macario, E. (2009). Bullying in middle schools: Results from a four-school survey. *Journal of School Violence*, 8(3), 264-279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220902910839>
- Popović-Čitić, B., Djurić, S., & Cvetković, V. (2011). The prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents: A case study of middle schools in Serbia. *School Psychology International*, 32(4), 412-424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034311401700>
- Raskauskas, J., & Stoltz, A. D. (2007). Involvement in traditional and electronic bullying among adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(3), 564-575. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.43.3.564>
- Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisén, A. (2013). The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(1), 26-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.024>
- Sourander, A., Klomek, A. B., Ikonen, M., Lindroos, J., Luntamo, T., Koskelainen, M., Ristkari, T., & Helenius, H. (2010). Psychosocial risk factors associated with cyberbullying among adolescents: A population-based study. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 67(7), 720-728.

<https://doi.org/10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2010.79>

Wright, M. (2018). Cyberbullying victimization through social networking sites and adjustment difficulties: The role of parental mediation. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 19(2), 113-123. <https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00486>