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Original Paper

The Influence of Collectivist Culture on Senior High School Students' Cognition of Cyberbullying

Ruoxuan Dong[1*]

[1] Linden Hall School for Girls, 212 East Main Street, Lititz, Pennsylvania 17543, United States

[*] Ruoxuan Dong, Linden Hall School for Girls, 212 East Main Street, Lititz, Pennsylvania 17543, United States

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has been an emerging problem among high schoolers and is increasing in rate with the wide use of the internet, and its negative effect on individual mental health. In this study, the researcher aims to explore the impact of collectivist culture to the high school students' perception of cyberbullying by using a survey that led to 324 valid respondents. The findings show that the collectivist cultural values have a significant effect on High School students as most students consider cyberbullying as an irrational emotional release, anti-social and legally outlawed. In this type of culture, pursuing group harmony may be a cultural incentive for not challenging and confronting others openly, but students still consider that online aggression does result in harm. Based on the research results, this study recommends two policies: First, the need to increase the education of students' cultural literacy so that students can harmonize with their groups and also be responsible as individuals in dealing with cyberbullying; and secondly, strengthening the reporting system and supporting students in school to be able to report so as to minimize refusal in action in the event of cyberbullying to prevent students from being silenced by peer pressure that can lead to dangerous responses. Studies like this one inform theoretical frameworks for intervening in the context of school bullying and give practical suggestions for culturally-responsive intervention strategies in collectivist contexts.

Keywords

collectivist culture, cyberbullying, high school students, perceptions

1. Introduction

Cyberbullying, a very common issue, has been introduced by the Internet use of adolescents. More and more, there is a danger that people will be openly embarrassed, excluded or become aggressive on the internet through the use of social media and instant messaging. Broadly speaking, cyberbullying can be defined as any insult or threatening of others (as a victim), exclusion or attack, in a deliberate and repeated way through digital technology (usually Internet) leading to immediate dissemination of the tortuous and impactful act that may create prolonged psychologic harm and stress on the victim (Lin, Wu, Li, Lin, & Chiang, 2014). Results of past studies shows that cyberbullying has a negative impact on emotional state, social adaptive ability and personality development, resulting to many side effects.

Bullying on a computer is especially a problem for the high school population, as well as others. They are avid users of the internet and are immersed in its different contexts for learning, keeping abreast of updates, and socialising; therefore, they are likely to be exposed to these risks more than others (Zhang, 2019). A study of 6, 202 pupils from 11-18 years old found an estimated 17% of pupils had experienced cyberbullying and that cyberbullying was significantly linked to increased anxiety, depression and self harm (Eyuboglu, Eyuboglu, Caliskan Pala, Oktar, Demirtas, Arslantas, & Unsal, 2021). In addition, Wright and Wachs (Wright & Wachs, 2023) indicated that more than half of the high school students who were cyberbullied endorsed clinical risk levels on measures of depression. Meta-analyses also suggest that there is 2.77 fold increase in the likelihood of depression among bullied children and adolescents as compared to their non-bullied peers (Ye, Wu, He, Ma, Peng, Mao, ... Tong, 2023). Overall, these findings highlight the need to pay particular attention to the mental health and social insertion of students from the second and third degrees of secondary school, as one of the most vulnerable groups.

These perceptions of cyberbullying are closely linked to high school students' coping mechanisms when they experience stress as a result of cyberbullying. Not very accurately evaluate the nature of cyberbullying phenomena and its harmful consequences as well as take proper action to counter cyberbullying – is largely dependent on cognitive frameworks coming from familial, school and cultural context (Låftman, Östberg, & Modin, 2017).

When analysed from the familial level, this is determined considerably by parenting styles and the way that communication takes place. Authoritative, overly-regulating or inattentive parents might encourage students not to take seriously and stop subtle ways of cyberbullying, which may decrease students' ability to identify and manage risks (DeSmet, Rodelli, Walrave, Portzky, Dumon, & Soenens, 2021). On the other hand, a warm and supportive parental involvement with coupled moderate levels of supervision and open communication increases adolescents' awareness of the intent and consequences of cyberbullying (Ortega-Barón, Postigo, Iranzo, Buelga, & Carrascosa, 2018). Good family communication can be an effective way to also help youths recognize online aggression, and increase their chances to reject or report (Chen, 2024). More than empirical studies validate the importance of

proactive actions of parents preventing perpetration or victimisation (2022).

These are also key factors in the quality and modality of communication. The families adopting "dialogic" approaches, expressional and co-participational in online activities fortify the analytical capacities and sensitivity to cyberbullying of adolescents (Chen, 2024). However, it can be observed that communication which is oriented towards compliance and supervising could have a negative impact on really expressing one's thoughts, so that people will be less aware of using the Internet misconductfully (Charalambous, Papagiannis, Papasavva, Leonidou, Constaninou, Terzidou, ... Sirivianos, 2020). Children who come from communicative families demonstrate greater adaptability in their interpersonal skills and thus have greater communication ability to identify cyberbullying compared to normal swear or seek support (Zhu, 2021).

China's culture is collectivist with its values significantly influencing behaviour and thinking. This tradition has a lasting effect and involves the social harmony, conformity to the norms and interests of the group (Guo, Ma, Jiang, & Yuan, 2017). There are several different views of collectivism—one group emphasizes group cohesion and conformity (Gu & Xue, 2022) and another group stresses hierarchy (Yang, 2011). However, a systematic examination of the influence of collectivism in determining high school students' perception of cyberbullying is not yet found in many studies.

The present study aimed to fill the lacking by researching the relationship between collectivist cultural orientation (as a cultural factor) and cyberbullying cognition in Chinese high school students. Its aims are to strengthen existing theoretical models regarding online behaviour among young people; to extend the body of knowledge about the types of cultural motivators and influences among youth that shape their reactions to cyberbullying; and to create or improve school-based digital literacy or school and community education efforts, guidance for families, and the development of policies that help to address the potential psychological and social harm of cyberbullying.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualization and Prevalence of Cyberbullying

As defined by (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett (2008) cyberbullying is the intentional, repetitive, haram (aggression or humiliation or exclusion) that is delivered or shared through digital media. Unlike traditional bullying, such bully is anonymous, immediate, (very) large scale and is "boundless" from a spatiotemporal perspective, making it even more difficult for the victim to flee and to suffer from psychological problems (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Considering the important developmental period of adolescents in high school combined with the significant amount of time spent online can create an increased risk of adolescents (Tokunaga, 2010). Cyberbullying is an important factor that clearly causes mental issues like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts which are consistently found in research to negatively influence mental health and social

functioning (Gini, & Espelage, 2014).

2.2 Factors Influencing Cyberbullying Perceptions

Factors such as parenting style, peer interaction, school environment, sex and maturity level of individuals and cultures direct the perception (Shi, Chen, & Li, 2021). Parent's treatment of the condition affects the emotional regulation and empathy, and consequently, the recognition and understanding of adolescents to the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Peer norms and pressures impact on tolerance levels and in the judging of aggressive acts. Modulating of sensitivity and coping is performed by the environment where the school is being carried out, especially the teacher-student relationship and school culture environments (Zhao, Liu, Nie, Teng, Cheng, & Zhang, 2021; Acosta, Chinman, Ebener, Malone, Phillips, & Wilks, 019). All these emotional responses are further shaped by gender, maturity, cultural values and power dynamics in defining what is a "bullying", "banter" and what to tolerate or retaliate.

2.3 Gaps in Existing Research

While the importance of the role that cultural factors play is increasingly acknowledged, these factors are an under-studied phenomenon. Group harmony and social evaluation might have unique influence in collectivist societies on the cognition and responses to cyberbullying. Even though there are some theoretical terms that the collectivist aspect of the Chinese culture is being recognized, there is not much of empirical research that would focus on the effects that it plays in China. Learners with a conformist emphasis might not ability to observe or deal with the cyberbullying (Smith & Robinson, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Sources

A questionnaire survey method was used in this study designed for the Chinese high school students. Firstly a large scale literature review was conducted, and a structured questionnaire was then created and uploaded onto Wenjuanxing platform. Data were collected from June to September 2025 by widely disseminating the online questionnaire that this platform generated and is easily distributed through Xiaohongshu and WeChat. Finally, a total of 324 responses were collected that were deemed valid.

3.2 Questionnaire Description

The questionnaire was divided into: demographics information, perspective on the culture of collectivism and perspective on cyberbullying.

In the demographic section, there were questions about the gender, age and type of residence, what were the most common social media platforms, and how long they spend on social media every day, regarding the type of school they attended. Among the 324 respondents, 163 were male (50.31%) and 161 were female (49.69%). In terms of age distribution, respondents were concentrated in the high school age range of 13-18 years: 118 students aged 13-14 (36.42%), 139 students aged 15-16 (42.90%), and 67

students aged 17-18 (20.68%).

Respondents' attitudes towards collectivist culture were studied via three dimensions: the collective interests, hierarchical order and role obligations, and relationship between the individuals and collectives. Measuring for each item was performed through a 5-point Likert type scale ranged "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree" and "strongly agree".

The collective interests has been composed of four items: You believe collective interests always comes above individual interests. You're prepared to let go of your own and work towards the team's goals. You are more inclined to take group needs into consideration rather than individual needs. Collective activities are preferred over personal activities (when there is a conflict).

Items for the hierarchical order and role obligations dimension were: You believe children should obey their parents' orders, rather than rebuke them. You don't think that teachers ever get things wrong. You think that pupils are "to be obeyed unconditionally" strongly under the management of class leaders. You feel that it should always be honoured that an old person should be respected and that a young person should be cared for.

Individual-collective relationship dimension had 2 items: You feel that students ought to cooperate instead of compete within the class. You feel that rules in the community should be adhered to and not broken.

Respondents' perceptions of cyberbullying was measured with three items. Each item was dichotomous choice, as follows: You consider cyberbullying an unreasonable emotional outlet. You think that cyberbullying is at odds with the social norms in mainstream society. You are of the opinion that cyberbullying is a crime.

For these, there were responses to choose from such as "reasonable" or "unreasonable" (or other positive and negative options).

4. Research Findings

The demographic characteristics of the 324 respondents are presented in Figures 1-3, including age distribution, school type distribution, and residential area distribution.

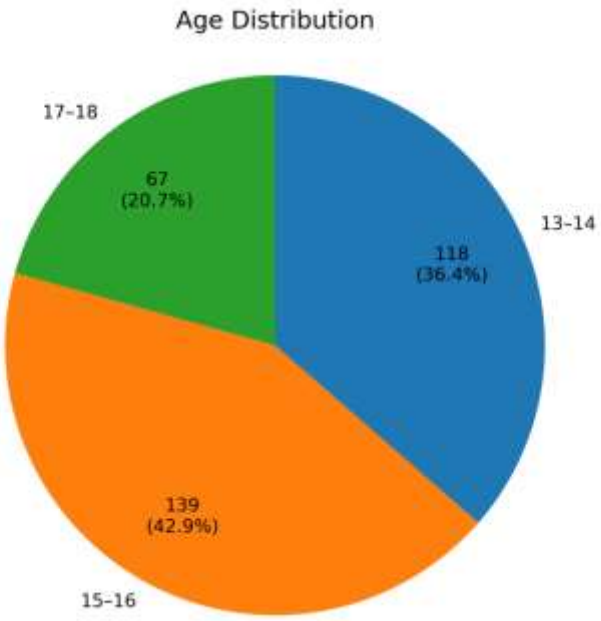


Figure 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1 shows that students aged 15-16 constituted the largest group (n = 139), followed by those aged 13-14 (n = 118) and 17-18 (n = 67).

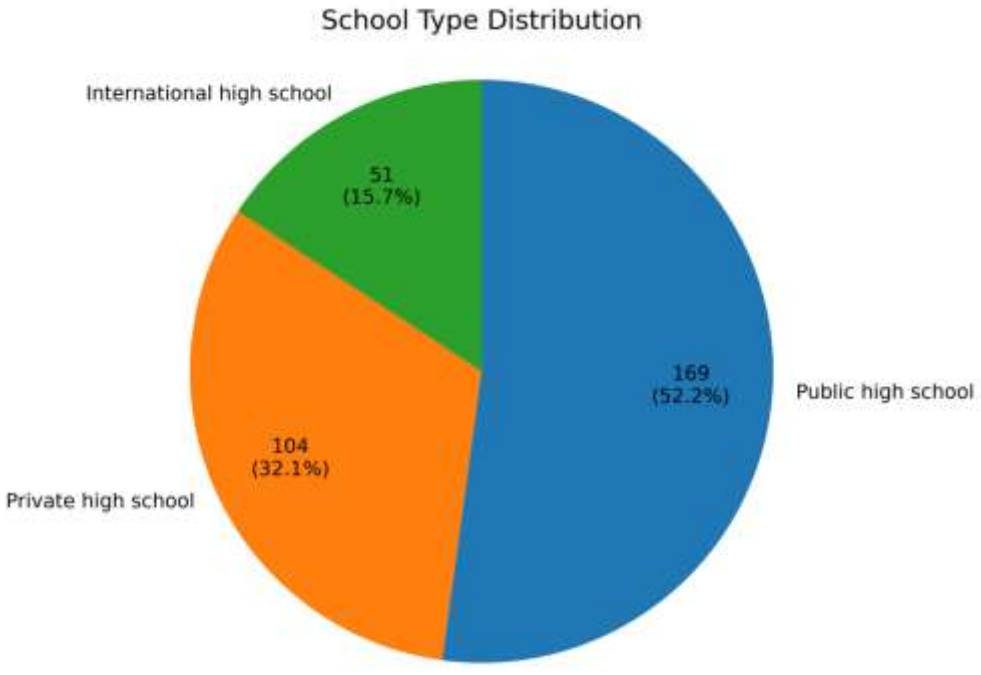


Figure 2. School Type Distribution of Respondents

As shown in Figure 2, most respondents were from public high schools (n = 169), followed by private high schools (n = 104) and international high schools (n = 51).

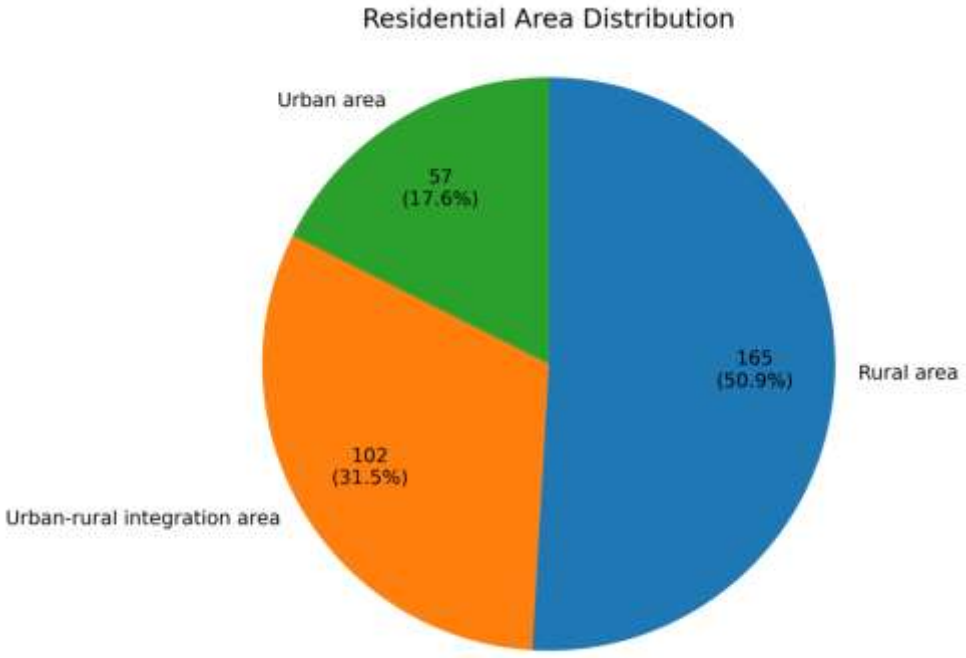


Figure 3. Residential Area Distribution of Respondents

According to Figure 3, the respondents who came from the rural areas (n = 165) were the largest subgroup, there were those respondents who came from urban-rural integration areas (n = 102) and there were the respondents from the urban areas (n = 57).

Respondents had clear attitudes about the three aspects of collectivist culture; collective interests, hierarchical order and role obligations and relations between the individual and collectivity. On the four items of collective interest, a relatively large share of the respondents had stressed importance of collective interests (see Figure 4).

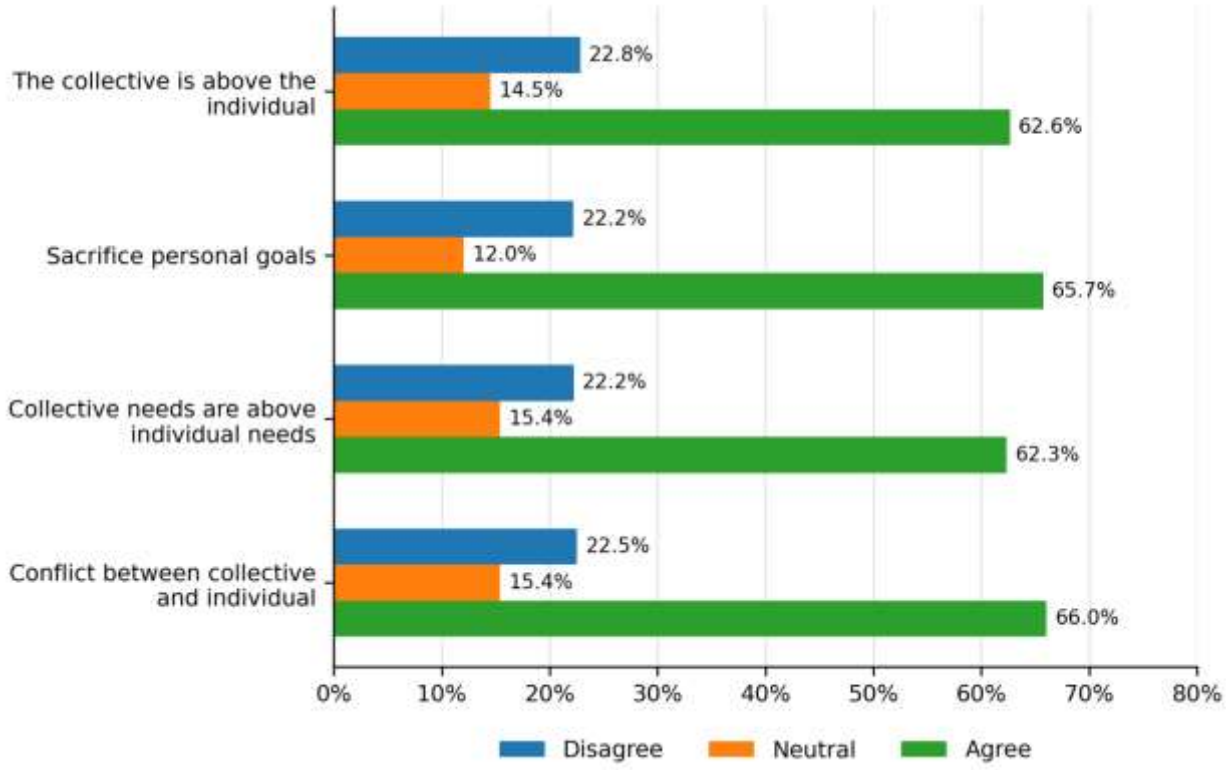


Figure 4. Agreement Proportions for Collective Interests Dimension

For the three items on hierarchical order and role obligations, respondents generally demonstrated high agreement. Most participants tended to endorse authority and established social norms, showing strong support for "obeying parental arrangements", "respecting teachers and elders", and "complying with collective management" (see Figure 5).

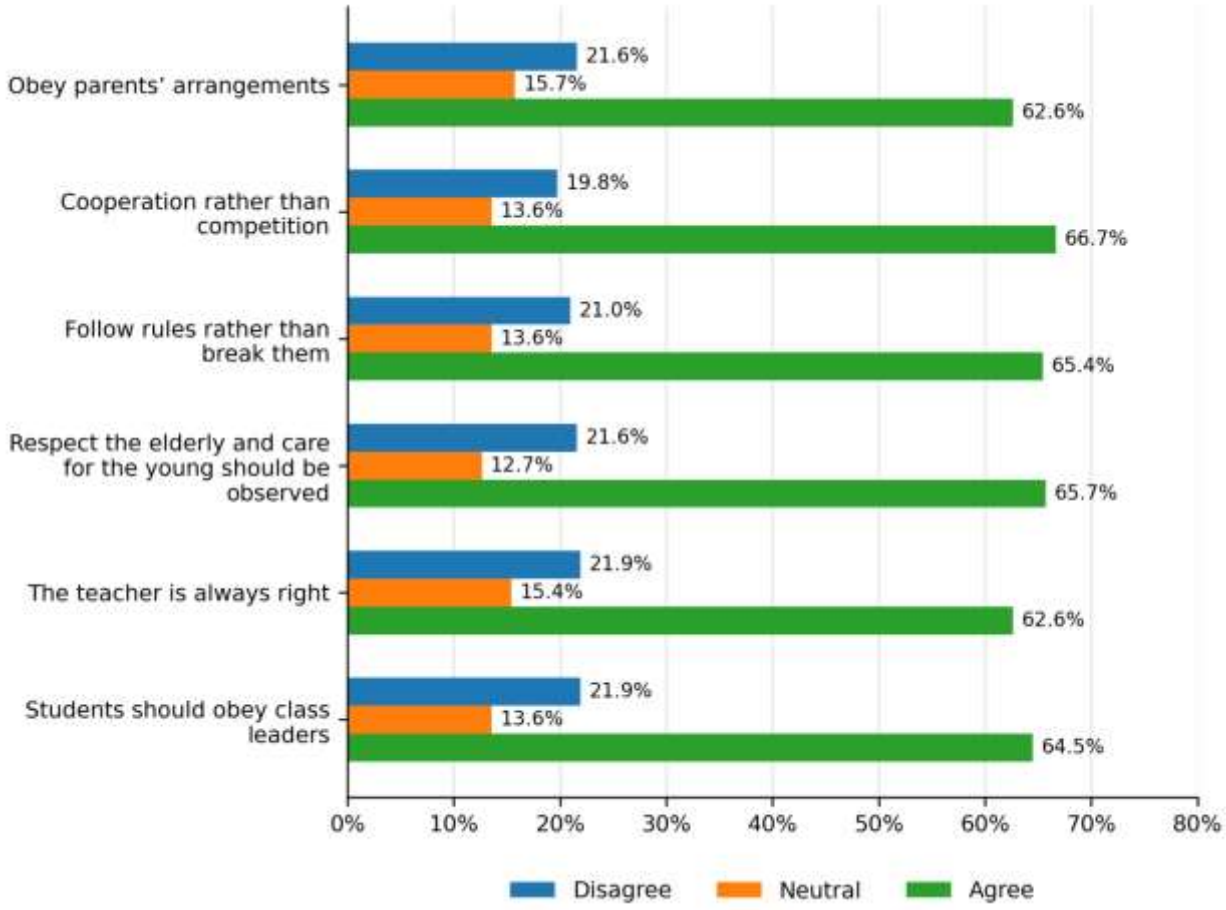


Figure 5. Agreement Proportions for Hierarchical Order and Role Obligations Dimension

5. Discussion

Demographic data results indicated a predominately 15-16 year old sample population, from a public high school, and living in a rural area. These characteristics have been given as context, for the interpretation of the subsequent findings towards collectivist culture and cyberbullying cognition.

This study differs from previous studies in determining collectivist cultural values as a dependent variable. The findings show that when a child/youth is exposed to some of these types of behaviours in their cultural environment, their family, school, and community may encourage some form of "silent conformity" among pupils when they experience cyberbullying (Li, Holt, Bossler, & May, 2016). This means that cyberbullying focused interventions need to be designed to teach students how to recognise and respond to cyberbullying, but also consider cultural factors that may affect their decision making around behavioural choices. The current study attempts to look into adolescents' actual behavioral response in situations of cyber bullying from a collectivist cultural perspective, which is contrasted with previous research that has focused mainly on one of the following three: cognition, moral judgment or

social media usage patterns.

Based on the results of this study, the suggestions that can be made are related to academic guidance in cyberbullying where education related to cyberbullying is carried out so that students' digital literacy becomes higher and student's independence in thinking and critical abilities. It is important for families and teachers to create safe and open areas for discussion to encourage children to ask for help and support in time when they are cyber-bullied. In addition, the appropriate reporting systems and the psychological support that one or another social media organisation or Educational institutes can offer must be developed to ensure a full protection (Hase, Goldberg, Smith, Stuck, & Campain, 2015). Overall, this research stresses the necessity to include several variables of culture, education and society in the development of interventions to combat cyberbullying which will make the measure more effective.

6. Conclusion

This study examines Chinese collectivist culture values and high school students' perception on cyberbullying to gain insight into how this perception relates to the Chinese collectivist culture values through a survey of 324 high school students. The results show that, the majority of pupils consider cyberbullying as an act that is against the social norms and legal rules. But considering the collectivist culture, some students may act like bystander and stay silent in response to this cyberbullying behavior (Li, Holt, Bossler, & May, 2016) and this reveals culture's role in moderating behavioral decision when confronted with a cyberbullying incident.

When subsequently examined, it is found that overall the collectivist cultural values have a significant impact on high school students. Although there was variation in how long the respondents use the social media and their reasons for using it, they all agree that cyberbullying was an inappropriate means of emotional release, incompatible with most social norms and the law.

Firstly, a strengthened culturally-embedded digital literacy and anti-bullying education, aimed at developing the ability of students to balance group harmony and individual responsibility is recommended. Second, the aspects of support and reporting at the school level should be improved to minimize the psychological effects caused by cyberbullying in terms of peer pressure and encourage students to act safely and appropriately against cyberbullying.

The results of this study suggest that, addressing cyberbullying would be better achieved through the action of a coalition between teachers, parents and social networks. Improved teaching digital literacy to minimize students' susceptibility to cyberbullying behaviors should be included in the curriculum in school (Aoyama, Barnard-Brak, & Talbert, 2011). Parent and teacher support is important to provide opportunities for children to raise issues and ask for help (Hase, Goldberg, Smith, Stuck, & Campain, 2015). In the meantime, psychosocial interventions should be made available on social media platforms for reporting to keep it safe online.

One weakness is the limited sample that is focused on rural areas; this does not necessarily cover all high schools in China and thus has limited generalizability of its findings. Extension of sampling needs to be carried out in future to make it applicable and reliable to other regions and other school types. Furthermore, better understanding of specific dynamics between the cultural and cyberbullying cognition and behaviors may provide for the development of more effective programs and interventions.

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