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COMBATING CYBERBULLYING AS STRATEGY TO DIMINISH THE STUDENTS' AGGRESSIVENESS

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This article addresses the relationship between cyberbullying and students' behaviors. At present, cyber security is one of the most discussed topics in most countries of the world. Cyber space is characterized by lack of borders, dynamism and anonymity, generating both opportunities for the development of the information society and risks to its functioning and its beneficiaries. Noting the noxious impact of cyberbullying on youth behaviors, we propose tackling cyberbullying as a strategy to diminish students' aggressiveness in the school.

Keywords: *bullying, cyberbullying, aggressiveness, cyber space, non-violent behavior, gender differences.*

COMBATAREA BULLYING-ULUI CIBERNETIC CA STRATEGIE DE DIMINUARE A AGRESIVITĂȚII ELEVILOR

În articol este abordată relația dintre bullying-ul cibernetic și comportamentele elevilor. La etapa actuală, securitatea cibernetică este unul dintre cele mai discutate subiecte în majoritatea țărilor lumii. Spațiul cibernetic se caracterizează prin lipsa frontierelor, dinamism și anonim, generând atât oportunități de dezvoltare a societății informaționale, cât și riscuri la adresa funcționării acesteia și a beneficiarilor săi. Constatând impactul nociv al bullying-ului cibernetic asupra comportamentelor tinerilor, propunem abordarea combaterii bullying-ului cibernetic ca strategie de diminuare a agresivității elevilor în școală.

Cuvinte-cheie: *bullying, bullying cibernetic, agresivitate, spațiu cibernetic, comportament non-violent, diferențe de gen.*

Introduction

The last years technological developments have added cyberspace as part of adolescents' social space. Different studies focused on cyberbullying elucidated critical implications for children, educators, and policy makers [1,2].

Bullying, which is prevalent in adolescents' social environment, also takes place in cyberspace, although it is believed to have a more potent and harmful effect [3].

Over 9.3 million visits in 2016 by people seeking help with bullying, cyberbullying and online safety.

Source: Google Analytics

With the social network explosion, cyberbullying has become extremely common. People can rant, rave, lie, taunt, post rumors or gossip, and destroy lives. Statistically, 40% of children and teens are victims of cyberbullying. However, it's not just children who are victims or cyberbullies. Adults can just as easily become prey or perpetrator of these vicious attacks [4].

What is bullying?

There is no universal definition of bullying, however, it is widely agreed upon that bullying is a subcategory of aggressive behavior characterized by the following three minimum criteria: (1) hostile intent, (2) imbalance of power, and (3) repetition over a period of time (Whittaker, 2016) [5].

The *UN Study on Violence against Children* (2012) considers bullying to be a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event. The most common form of bullying is verbal, which, if left unchecked, can lead also to physical violence [6].

According to UNESCO/UNWomen (2016) – the bullying is behaviour repeated over time that intentionally inflicts injury of discomfort through physical contact, verbal attacks, or psychological manipulation. Bullying involves an imbalance of power [7].

Bullying is divided into four basic types of abuse – emotional (sometimes called relational), verbal, physical, and cyber. It typically involves subtle methods of coercion, such as intimidation.

Our article is focused on exploration of connection between cyberbullying and students' behaviors.

Cyberbullying - the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature [8]. Heiman, T., Olenik-Shemesh, D., & Eden, S. (2015) extended the definition: Cyberbullying is defined as an intentional online act via electronic media, to harm, embarrass and/or humiliate another person [9].

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. When an adult is involved, it may meet the definition of cyber-harassment or cyberstalking, a crime that can have legal consequences and involve jail time [10]. This includes email, instant messaging, social networking sites (such as Facebook), text messages, and cell phones. And the problem is a worldwide recognized issue.

We consider that the more comprehensive description of the cyberbullying is offered by UN Study on Violence against Children (2012): Cyber-bullying - that is bullying by means of emails, online chat lines, personal web pages, text messages and transmission of images – is increasingly becoming a source of concern. For children around the world, innovative technologies offer opportunities to create new spaces of interaction and to develop new forms of socialization. At the same time, these technologies make children potentially vulnerable to harassment and bullying in guises and ways that are often difficult for adults – parents, caregivers, teachers and others – to detect and respond to, particularly since it is a phenomenon that tends to take place in spaces that do not come under adult supervision. Cyberbullying may have its origins in face-to-face social interaction in the learning environment; however, children do not escape its influence at the end of the school day [11].

Research is beginning to offer a greater understanding of the extent and nature of cyber-bullying. The European Union Kids Online initiative conducted a survey of 25,000 internet users between the ages of 9 and 16, together with one parent of each interviewee, across 25 European countries (2010), found that 93 per cent go online at least weekly. Six per cent of the sample indicated that they had been sent nasty or hurtful messages online and three per cent admitted to having sent such messages to others. Most children who had received bullying messages online called on social support; one quarter, however, indicated that they had not informed anyone. Six in ten had also used online strategies such as deleting hurtful messages or blocking the bully [*apud* 12].

Students' perceptions of bullying

The aforementioned terms served as a landmark in the 4th focus group meetings with Arab students from a high school in Jerusalem. Thus, meetings with 2 groups of boys and 2 groups of girls from different classes were organized: class 5 and class 11 (a total of 48 students: 12 in group). During the sessions the students'/ pupils' knowledge and attitude towards school violence/bullying was explored.

At the same time, during the sessions the relationship between cyber bullying and involvement in traditional bullying was also explored.

The results were as follows:

- Regarding the terms proposed for discussion, most students have used the terms more often: violence, aggression, manifested by concrete actions such as blows / beatings, threats, pushing, ugly words, etc. The term "bullying" has created more insights, with more detailed explanations, especially among pupils in smaller classes. Students of older classes were more familiar with the term bullying compared to those in small classes.

- The part of students (boys and girls) noted that cyberbullying is a problem in their school.

- There is an overlap between involvement in cyberbullying and involvement in traditional bullying.

- Cyberbullying was mentioned especially by girls – as intimidation / bullying online with ugly words, nicknames, teasing, facts that hardly affected them.

- Girls were more likely to be cyber victims than boys and that boys were more likely to be cyber bullies than girls.

- All students and pupils have confirmed the negative impact of violence on victims: diminishing interest and lessons learned, lack of lessons, isolation from colleagues and other. Girls often indicated depression, falling self-confidence, bad relationships with girls colleagues, but especially with boys colleagues.

- At the same time, most boys have mentioned that cyberbullying often infuriates them, makes them more aggressive, causes them revenge.

- Discussion of the relationships between gender and social support variables such as friends, family, and others, shows that girls who were cyber victims reported having more support than cyber bullied boys.

- Students (especially girls) recognized the important role of the social support in empowering victims of cyberbullying. Also, was recognized a significant influence of social support on children and teenagers' well-being.
- Boys and girls have specified some measures to prevent cyberbullying such as: computer literacy training to prevent cyberbullying/ Cyberbullying Knowledge, Internet communication, prevention and management of aggressive emotions, etc.
- Policy proposals: punish aggressors/ bullied, including cyber perpetrators; develop social support services; train parents how to help children victims of cyberbullying.

Recommendations to prevent bullying, including cyberbullying

Prevention of bullying, including cyberbullying should include various educational, informational, social, cultural-religious strategies, and so on. Respectively, based on general strategies proposed by UNICEF [13], we would like to propose the following:

1. Parents' training on helping children and adolescents / providing support to manage the risks and challenges of bullying, including cyberbullying. It is important for both parents and children to understand the dangers and proper use of the internet and social media, and how to respond to a variety of potentially dangerous situations. In addition to learning about the kinds of sites children should avoid, it is also important to provide parents and children with positive alternatives and educational sites that they can visit and explore.

2. Raising awareness of the risks of violence and bullying for the protection and health of children among all actors involved in the educational process: teachers, administrative staff, parents, students.

3. Helping children and adolescents to manage risks and challenges through educational programs. Forming children's resilience to cyberbullying. Incorporating the subjects of self-esteem, respect and cooperation between boys and girls, emotion management, constructive and non-violent communication among students.

4. Changing attitudes and social standards that encourage bullying, including cyberbullying. Implementation at national and international level of public awareness campaigns on the negative consequences of bullying, including cyberbullying on the development of children and adolescents.

5. Promoting and providing support services to child victims of bullying, including cyberbullying. Ensuring and facilitating access to support and rehabilitation services for children and adolescents involved in bullying (victims, aggressors, witnesses).

6. Implement laws and police to protect children and adolescents from violence, including cyberbullying. Elaboration and implementation of national and regional policies/ actions on cyber security.

7. Collection of data and conducting studies, - essential for designing planning and intervention strategies, and setting targets for monitoring progress and eliminating violence, including cyberbullying.

Best practices on bullying and cyberbullying prevention

Bullying prevention is the collective effort to prevent, reduce, and stop bullying. Many campaigns and events are designated to bullying prevention throughout the world. Bullying prevention campaigns and events include: Anti-Bullying Day, Anti-Bullying Week, International Day of Pink, International STAND UP to Bullying Day, and National Bullying Prevention Month.

The European Commission has sponsored Safer Internet Centers in 30 European countries, made up of awareness centers, hotlines, and in some countries, helplines. The centers and helplines are organized in a pan-European network called INSAFE. The centers help raise awareness about threats posed to children online. They have also developed events such as the Safer Internet Day in Europe. In addition, they set up youth panels and other activities in various European countries. The hotlines are organized in a pan-European network called INHOPE. INHOPE also works with the US, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, South Africa, Russia, and South Korea [14].

In Israel, multiple strategies are utilized by government agencies, the internet industry, NGOs and public organizations to raise awareness about internet safety and to prevent bullying. The Ministry of Education coordinates a National Safer Internet Day, in which the Israel Police and the Ministry of Public Security and its civilian crime prevention programs participate, including Metzila, City Without Violence and the Israel Anti-Drug Authority. These organizations take an active role in educating the public, students and the community about the dangers of the internet, proper and responsible use of social media, what behavior may be considered unlawful and what to do if you are a victim of violence or abuse on the internet [15].

In 2010, Moldova launched the e-Transformation process of the Government. This strategic program provides a unified vision of modernizing and improving the efficiency of public services through IT Governance. Information security - confidence in the security, integrity and availability of information systems - is essential for the logical development of a modern state, but it would also mean the implementation of new systems and measures to protect these information systems [16].

In Israel, The Ministry's Metzila division, together with the Ministry of Education, developed a "Safe Surfing Pact" in Hebrew and Arabic and called on children and parents to sign it and pledge to follow a number of safety guidelines. The pact reached thousands of parents, who discussed the guidelines with their children and signed the pact, and was featured in the news [17].

Republic of Moldova (example of educational activity)

During 18-19 of February 2017 over 30 high school students from all over the country attended IT Academy in Chisinau, Moldova. This workshop aimed to introduce students to the concept of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) and to encourage youth towards tech field. During 2 days, participants learned about mobile apps, 3D modeling, UI/UX design, Photoshop and even safety on internet. Professional trainers and teachers led interactive sessions to inspire young people to choose a career path in the STEAM field, but also to use technology and social media platforms safely. The workshop was organized with the support of FLEX-Ability grant and in partnership with Faculty of Urbanism and Architecture, Technical University of Moldova.

Conclusions

Cyberbullying is the use of the internet and related technologies to hurt an individual or group of individuals in a deliberate, repeated and hostile manner.

In many countries, Israel and Moldova included, children and teens are often exposed to internet bullying, whether as victims, bystanders or supporters. This threat has worsened as internet related technologies and devices have become omnipresent in society, and specifically available to children. In many cases, cyberbullying has become an extension of school bullying that can reach victims in the "safety" of their homes.

Internet violence and bullying are a widespread phenomenon, but they do not have to be. With persistent efforts in the fields of education, public awareness and legislation, the society can create a safe and secure online environment for children and adults. At the same time, combating cyberbullying can be used as strategy to diminish the students' aggressiveness in the school too.

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