Social Skills Predict Cyber Bullying Among University Students

Ms. Saba Zer Naz Hafsa[*] & Dr. Rubina Hanif[⊥]

Abstract

Present research investigated the role of social skills as predictor of cyber bullying among university students. The study was based on cross sectional survey research design. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and CBVQ (adapted in present study) previously developed by Campfield (2008) was administered on the sample of 386 university students of age range of 18-30 years of public and private sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad through convenient sampling. Scales depicted good internal item consistency. Results declared social skills are negatively linked with cyber bullying. Regression analysis revealed that university students with high score on social skills will experience less cyber bullying and vice versa. Hence it appeared as a significant negative predictor of cyber bullying among university students. As social skills explained significant amount of variance i.e.; $R2= .03$ for cyber bullying experiences.

Keywords

Cyber bullying, Social Skills, Protective factor of cyber bullying, University students

Introduction

Currently people live in an information era. Electronic media like cellular phones and desktops are universal in our society. The advantages of media networks are outstanding, however, there are number of challenges for its users e.g., in the form of cyber bullying. Institutions

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[*] Lecturer of Psychology at Preston University, Islamabad.

[⊥] Assistant Professor at National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

and organizations face challenges due to influx of technology in all aspects of civilian's lives.

Bullying through electronic media has become a great alarm for educators, parents and governments. Many young people become victims due to use of the social networks. Advances in communication technologies result in high rate of new type of bullying called as cyber bullying. It is just like new bottle but old wine (Li, 2005). Much research has been carried out with traditional bullying among school aged children at school level but only handful researches are available on said topic with the sample of adults or university age students. Cyber bullying is on boom since last decade. Merritt (2013) found that cyber bullying is a big issue in Asia as it is elsewhere. In 2013 it was stated in The Straits Times Asia Report that cyber bullying is an issue that needs to be investigated on immediate basis.

Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying is defined as the repeated and deliberated harm to other(s) inflicted by the use of computer, mobile phones and such other electronic appliances (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Bullying can increase anti-social behaviour, which in turn can impact social skills. Bullied children withdraw socially, they lack perceiving and responding emotions. Studies report an inverse relationship between cyber bullying and social skills (Meyer et al., 2004).

Cyber bullying has become the emerging problem in the world. There are evidences of its prevalence among the adolescents and youth. For example, in the United States a high number of young people are involved in cyber bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Lenhart (2007) stated that one out of every 3 of adolescents encounters cyber bullying. Thorp (2004) found that 6% of the youth have experience of cyber bullying. Juvonen and Gross (2008) stated that 72% of respondents encountered at least one online bullying. Similarly according to Mishnaa et al. (2012) one out of every four students (25.7%) is involved in cyber bullying as bully and victim. Campfield (2008) showed that 69% of people were the part of cyber bullying and victimization. Campbell (2005) indicated that over a quarter of the students knew about those

persons who had been cyber bullied while 11% reported themselves as bullying others through technology and other 14% had been targeted by cyber bullying. Cross, Monks, Campbell, Spears and Slee (2011) suggested that almost 10% of the students had been sent upsetting messages on internet during the past school term and the figure is high for the girls with 12.5%.

Research on cyber bullying is in its infancy with respect to context of Pakistan. A few media reporting and little amount of researches highlighted the said issue (Imran, 2014). For example, a report on famous print and electronic media Urdu Point in 2014 highlighted an incidence: a student of Lahore University of Management and Technology (UMT) made pictures of girls' students public without their permission on fake Facebook page. Khawar and Malik (2016) found significant differences across gender for certain types of victimization. Magsi et al. (2017) unveiled that female students were threatened and blackmailed frequently in university. Here question arises that how students at their educational place and home may be protected from bullying through cyber space?

Social Skill

Mayer and Salovey (1993) coined the term of emotional intelligence. In 1997, Bar-On defined social skills as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures". It is the ability to recognize the meanings of emotion and their relationships and to reason and solve problem on their basis. It is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them (Mayer et al.,1999).

Emotional intelligence is important social tool; it facilitates us to sustain our relationships. It may be defined as; a collection of inter or intra-personal proficiencies which are not necessarily a part of general intelligence or professional skills (Kierstead, 1999). Social skills may also be defined as the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It also includes the aptitudes to perceive emotions,

to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intelligence growth (Mayer et al., 2000).

Bar-On (2005) revised his definition of emotional intelligence as it is a set of personality traits and abilities that predict emotional and social adaptation within environment. Bar-On (2006) referred emotional intelligence as emotional social intelligence. According to him, it is better to understand emotional intelligence in a broad panorama "social emotional intelligence." It is the cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively people understand and express themselves, understand others and relate with them and cope with daily demands. Hence it is also known as social skills.

Factors Related to Cyber Bullying

Following are the evidence based factors that are related to cyber bullying in any way.

Research has shown that cyber bullying victims tend to exhibit the following characteristics: anxious, insecure, low self-esteem, less social skills, few friends, and physically weaker than peers (Banks, 1997). Victims of cyber bullying lack social skills and peer relationships (Ladd & Burgess, 1999). Tsai and Lin (2003) reported that internet addiction is correlated to the self-esteem, poor interpersonal relationship, impulsive and aggressive behaviour.

Research revealed that individuals with high score on social skills are less likely to be involved in negative behaviours (Mayer et al., 2004). There is a positive relationship between social skills and psychological wellbeing (Fatima & Gillani, 2005). Social skills is an important social tool, it helps mediating our relationships. Individuals who scored high on social skills also seem to do better in school and succeed at their jobs. Willard (2007) confirmed that cyber bullying victims have low social skills.

McLaughlin, Byers and Oliver (2010) revealed social skills may play a central role in generating an effective response for cyber bullying. It is important to consider the benefits of promoting social skills, which

have been proven to be helpful in decreasing the incidents of cyber bullying (Goleman, 2011). Factors like attachment to parent and peers, parental involvement, parental awareness, parental participation and social skills also play a crucial role to protect individuals from cyber bullying (Carter, 2011; Yousef, 2011). According to Moore et al. (2011) teenagers having low emotional intelligence face deficits in social information processing and affect recognition, and are on a high risk to develop anxiety and committing suicide after the experiences of cyber bullying.

In the same way Fanti et al. (2012) also found that family, peer, school social support and social skills are the protective factors of cyber bullying. Social skills contributed significantly in prediction of cyber bullying. Perpetrators of cyber bullying possess low social skills with high levels of psychoticism and neuroticism. They also revealed that social skills significantly predict cyber bullying (Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2013). Smith and Steffgen (2013) also found that cyber bullying risk can be buffered through social skills.

Given the use of technology, both inside and outside the classroom for social networking, individuals must have improved social skills to polish technological skills necessary to resist the bullying in cyber space (Goleman, 2010).

Students, educators and parents are experiencing this issue nowadays. It increasingly becomes a problem for students, educators and policy makers (Cassidy et al., 2012). Therefore, present research aims at examining the role of social skills in prediction of cyber bullying experiences among university students.

Objectives

Present research was aimed to fulfil following objectives:

To investigate the relationship between social skills and cyber bullying among university students,

To examine the role of emotional intelligence in prediction of cyber bullying among university students.

Research Design

Participants: in order to meet the objectives of present study total sample of 386 participants comprised of male (n=200) and female (n=186) with age range 18-30 years (M= 22.23, SD=2.46) of public and private sector universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi recruited conveniently. Data was gathered from only those participants who volunteered to participate and who were the users of electronic media (cell phones, social media).

Detail of instruments used in present study is given as:

Cyber Bullying Victimization Questionnaire: it was originally developed by Campfield (2008) and adapted in present study with the consent of author. It has 48 items with three response categories and Alpha reliability .94. First, second and third response categories measure prevalence, experience and bothersomeness of cyber bullying respectively. In present research, responses on two categories are considered for data analysis i.e., cyber bullying experiences and cyber bullying bothersomeness. Response category that measures experiences of cyber bullying is designed on five-point Likert type format with response options 1-2 times (1), once a week (2), few times a month (3), almost every day (4), daily (5). Response category that measures bothersomeness about cyber bullying, participants had to choose between three options i.e. none (0), some (1), very much (2).

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS): EIS developed by Batool and Khalid (2011) was used to measure the social skills among university students. It is a self-report measure which was developed on emotional intelligence model of Bar-On (2006). Respondents used 4-point Likert type response options, on which 1= never true of me, 2= sometime true of me, 3= often true of me and 4= always true of me. Ten items (7, 9, 13, 17, 26, 30, 42, 47, 48 and 49) scored in reverse. Scores on EIS range from minimum 56 to maximum 224. Cronbach's alpha for EIS reported as .95 (Batool & Khalid, 2011). High scores on EIS reflect high social skills and low scores reflect low social skills possessed by the participants.

Procedure

Participants of current study were recruited from public and private sector universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi and permission was taken from the competent authorities for data collection. Only volunteers were included in the sample by taking consent. Questionnaires booklet was handed over to participants and they were briefed about the nature of research. Participants were given both written instructions in the questionnaire booklet and verbal instruction by researcher that how to respond. They were requested to read each statement carefully and respond as honestly as possible by choosing the option that appeared close to their personal experiences. It was assured that all the information provided by the participants would be kept confidential and will be utilized for research purpose only. No time limits were set to fill the questionnaires. In the end, gratitude was paid to participants for their valuable cooperation.

Results

The present study was aimed to investigate the role of social skills in prediction of cyber bullying among university students. In order to meet the study objectives Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis are applied.

Table 1) Correlation Index of Cyber bullying Experiences, Perception of Cyber bullying and Emotional Intelligence (N=386).

Variable	1	2	3
1.Cyber Bullying Experiences	-	-.69**	-.16**
2.Cyber Bullying Bothersomeness		-	.09
3.Social Skills			-

*p < .05, ** p < 0.01, ***p<0.001*

Table 1 indicates the Pearson correlation for cyber bullying experiences, bothersomeness about cyber bullying and emotional intelligence. It is evident from the results that cyber bullying experiences

and cyber bullying bothersomeness are significantly negatively associated (p < 0.01, .0.5) with social skills.

   Table 2) Linear Regression Analysis to test the effect of Emotional Intelligence on Cyber Bullying Victimization (N = 386).

		Cyber Bullying Experiences
		95%CI
Variable	*B*	*LL, UL*
Constant	54.03***	[34.63, 73.42]
Social Skills	-.20**	{-.32, -.08}
R^2		.03
F		11.97**

Note: B= un-standardized regression coefficient; CI= Confidence Interval; *LL=* Lower Limit; *UL=* Upper Limit; ****p*<.001.

   Table 2 indicated that social skills significantly negatively predicting the cyber bullying experiences among university students. It is considered as predictor variable and cyber bullying experiences considered as outcome variable. It is evident from results that social skills (β= -.20, p<.001) is a significant negative predictor of cyber bullying experiences.

Discussion

   In Pakistan, research on cyber bullying is in its infancy. It is a small effort carried to investigate the said issue indigenously. As literature and theories guide the phenomena that social skills may reduce the negative behaviours like aggression, abuse, behavioural problems, bullying and even cyber bullying, in present study it was seen that social skills can help to reduce cyber bullying among university students.

In order to meet the present study objective, linear regression analysis was calculated. Findings indicated that social skills act as a significant negative predictor of cyber bullying among university students. The current findings are consistent with the previous research evidence. According to Rae (2009) high social skills tends to minimize bullying incidences. Social skills play a central role to curb the said situation. In present research, significant negative relationship was found between social skills and cyber bullying.

It is clear that more cyber bullying experiences reflect more prevalence of cyber bullying. Results reflected that if cyber bullying experiences are high then presence of high social skills may help university students to buffer cyber bullying experiences. These results are parallel to studies conducted in past suggesting that social skills found to be having significant negative predictor of bullying among adolescents (Lomas, Stough, Hansen, & Downey, 2012). Santesso, Dana, Schmidt and Segalowitz (2006) note that social skills is the ability to understand, generate and regulate the emotions. Teenagers can manage cyber bullying by understanding their feelings and emotional experiences, interaction with others, being realistic to understand difficult situations, and capability to withstand stress without losing emotional control.

It was aimed to investigate that university students with high social skills will experience less cyber bullying and vice versa. Present research findings go parallel with the findings in literature that is; social skills is an important factor to combat the problem of cyber bullying (e.g.; Carter, 2011; Yousef, 2011). Results revealed that university students counter cyber bullying as they scored low on social skills scale, which convey the meaning that they need social skill trainings. However, parents should advise their children on how to use technology like social media and cellular phone in order to reduce the risks of cyber bullying. In 2011, Prime Research Writers revealed that talking to their parents about their experiences on the social networks minimizes cyber bullying for the teens.

Implications

Implication aspect of current research can be classified as following: (1) educational level implications, (2) theory level implications and (3) practice level implications.

Educational level implications. Awareness campaigns regarding antecedents and outcomes of the said issue should be launched in universities and in social settings. It is important for parents of victims and perpetrators to become aware of the issue so that they may protect their child of being caught in such problems. Parents should be aware of the electronic activities of their off springs as by doing so they may facilitate them.

Theory level implications. Current research is aimed to complement the existing literature on cyber bullying. It provides the lens of multiple theories like Darwin (1872) evolutionary theory in social context and Campfield's theory to analyse the directions of behaviours like victimization and perpetration.

Practice level implications. Competent authorities in universities may collaborate with state to assign task to psychologists to develop and implement social skill training program within universities for students as well as in schools. University students will become well equipped to fight with social difficulties like cyber bullying.

Limitations and Future Directions

Present study is lacking in identification of forms of cyber bullying and to find which form is more prevalent in present context. Study design was cross-sectional, it has less depth. Data is small to generalize current research findings on whole population of Pakistan. Other sampling technique like stratified sampling may also be helpful and productive in order to reach a meaningful conclusion. Last but not least, social skills training programs should be adapted and implemented in university and school settings in order to equip students with resources to curb the negative behaviours.

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