CYBERBULLYING VICTIMS: COPING STRATEGIES AND VICTIMIZATION CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying, an intentional and aggressive act carried out through electronic media, is a new form of bullying spreading along with the dissemination of new technologies. Cyberbullying, which is often connected with traditional school bullying (Olweus, 2012) constitutes a severe threat for children's health and development: victims experience various forms of attacks as well as negative consequences (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Despite large body of studies on reactions to online victimization (Livingstone et al., 2011; Perren et al., submitted; Walrave & Heirman, 2011), little is known about individual context of using particular coping strategies. This study thus examine patterns of use of specific coping strategies and their relation to individual and contextual characteristic of cyber-attacks victims.

METHOD

The data come from survey carried in randomly selected schools in South Moravian region in Czech Republic. Of 2,092 students aged 12-18 , 451 reported experience with cyberbullying (mean age: 15.26, *SD*=1.84; 67.8% females). These children were asked about context of their experience (perceived harm, length of victimization) and 26 responses covering seven categories of coping strategies discussed in literature: technological coping, retaliation, seeking social support, confronting the bully, avoidance/ignoring, reframing, and dissociation (Dehue et al., 2008; Parris et al., 2011; Perren et al., submitted). Further, characteristics known to be connected to online victimization (self-esteem, self-control, and quality of peer and parental relationships) and consequences (internalization and externalization) (Calvete et al., 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kostas et al., 2012; Vasznoyi et al., 2012) were measured.

Table 1. Latent class analysis: Estimated probability of applying coping strategies across classes of cyber-attacks victims.

Coping strategies	Ignoring $n = 126$ (28.0%)	Escaping $n = 146$ (32.4%)	Preventing $n = 178$ (39.6%)	Categories of coping strategies
I thought to myself that he or she wouldn't do something similar to me in real life.	0.548	0.450	0.229	DISSOCIATION
I didn´t pay attention to it.	0.702	0.328	0.153	AVOIDANCE
I thought to myself that it was actually nothing serious.	0.840	0.207	0.038	REFRAMING
I thought to myself that something like that could not hurt me.	0.725	0.469	0.122	REFRAMING
I simply took it lightly.	0.892	0.617	0.102	AVOIDANCE
I decided to ignore it.	0.815	0.765	0.396	AVOIDANCE
I thought to myself that such things simply happen on the internet.	0.825	0.733	0.312	DISSOCIATION
I thought to myself that whoever is doing this to me is not worth my time.	0.816	0.911	0.625	REFRAMING
I thought to myself that the person was pitiful and stupid.	0.896	0.984	0.818	REFRAMING
I told someone about it.	0.610	0.779	0.766	SOCIAL SUPPORT
I deleted the person from my contacts.	0.545	0.897	0.581	TECHNOLOGICAL
I deleted the messages which troubled me.	0.511	0.699	0.584	TECHNOLOGICAL
I changed my settings so that the person could not contact me anymore (e.g. blocking the person, filtering).	0.498	0.794	0.515	TECHNOLOGICAL
I tried to focus on something else to avoid thinking about what happened.	0.421	0.963	0.726	AVOIDANCE
I started avoiding the person in real life.	0.139	0.782	0.460	AVOIDANCE
I thought to myself that if something similar were to happen in real life, it would be much worse.	0.409	0.854	0.411	DISSOCIATION
I changed my phone no./email/profile/nickname.	0.077	0.376	0.198	TECHNOLOGICAL
I deleted my profile on the web pages where this happened.	0.000	0.334	0.098	TECHNOLOGICAL
I stopped visiting the web pages where this happened.	0.047	0.303	0.120	AVOIDANCE
I tried talking to the person on the internet or via mobiles to persuade him or her to stop.	0.284	0.460	0.437	CONFRONTING
I tried face-to-face talking about this behavior with the person or somehow persuade her or him to stop.	0.406	0.498	0.411	CONFRONTING
I thought to myself that it was only happening online, and that it wasn't actually real.	0.370	0.309	0.041	DISSOCIATION
I reported this to the administrator.	0.224	0.213	0.163	TECHNOLOGICAL
I searched for advice on the internet.	0.013	0.251	0.088	TECHNOLOGICAL
I did something similar to the person, face-to-face (in real life).	0.274	0.215	0.136	RETALIATION
I did the same thing or something similar to the person online or via mobiles.	0.182	0.102	0.099	RETALIATION

RESULTS: Groups

The latent class analysis of 26 coping strategies resulted in solution with 3 classes, which differed in amount and types of applied strategies (Table 1).

„Ignoring"
- most distinctive respondents
- use of reframing and avoiding strategies and only marginally technological coping

„Escaping"
- use of reframing and more radical forms of technological coping

„Preventing"
- Use of reframing and technological coping

RESULTS: Group differences

The differences among these classes were examined in more depth, with regard to individual and contextual variables and consequences of cyberbullying (Table 2). The main differences were found in comparing both other groups to "Ignoring", but not between "Preventing" and "Escaping" groups. "Ignoring" group consisted of children with higher self-esteem, whose perceived harm, length of victimization and level of internalizing behavior was lower than among children in other two groups.

Table 2. Test of equality of means across latent classes using posterior probability-based multiple imputations.

		Ignoring	Escaping	Preventing
Individual variables				
Gender (females)	Proportion	0.496	0.798**	0.710**
Age	Mean	15.395	15.145	15.257
	S.E.	0.170	0.167	0.152
Self esteem	Mean	2.915	2.616**	2.651**
	S.E.	0.056	0.049	0.046
Low self control	Mean	2.581	2.458	2.438
	S.E.	0.056	0.053	0.047
Relationship to parents (trust)	Mean	3.700	3.747	3.748
	S.E.	0.077	0.079	0.076
Relationship to parents (alienation)	Mean	2.629	2.699	2.594
	S.E.	0.070	0.069	0.070
Relationship to parents (communication)	Mean	3.379	3.520	3.564
	S.E.	0.094	0.096	0.086
Relationship to peers (rejection)	Mean	1.904	1.896	1.888
	S.E.	0.061	0.070	0.058
Relationship to peers (ambivalence)	Mean	2.128	2.433*	2.404*
	S.E.	0.066	0.071	0.065
Context of victimization				
Perceived harm	Mean	1.876	2.821**	3.001**
	S.E.	0.072	0.071	0.061
Length of harm	Mean	1.913	3.340**	3.504**
	S.E.	0.123	0.122	0.110
Consequences of victimization				
Internalization	Mean	1.484	2.483**	2.417**
	S.E.	0.062	0.077	0.066
Externalization	Mean	0.578	0.639	0.651
	S.E.	0.064	0.056	0.058

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .001. Marked values indicate significant differences between group "Ignoring" and both other groups. No significant difference was found between group "Escaping" and "Preventing".

CONCLUSIONS

Despite similarity in individual and contextual characteristics, distinct clusters of used coping strategies were identified

Among the first group, there is clear pattern of trivializing and ignoring the victimization. These children seem to be victims of less serious attacks, in which case simple ignoring the situation may be just sufficient. But, second and third group seem to be trying hard to cope with their experience suggesting that these are dealing with more severe form of cyberbullying.