



## Introduction

- Cyberbullying is a serious problem in adolescence. Recent studies have turned their focus on coping strategies that victims use, i.e. on how they respond to cyberbullying (Perren et al., 2012). Several researchers point out victims of cyberbullying may react maladaptively to cyberbullying (Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Ybarra, 2004) and use inefficient coping strategies, such as retaliation and avoidance, and are reluctant to report cyberbullying to adult authorities (Agatston et al., 2007; DiBasilio 2008; Juvonen and Gross, 2008), which complicate solving the cyberbullying problem.
- The goal of this study was to examine to what extent victims of cyberbullying use maladaptive coping strategies. To answer this question, we examined how victims coped with online victimization and how the selection of coping strategies differed depending on perceived harm as a result of cyberbullying and the length of online victimization. We assumed that targets of short-term or long-term victimization lacking severe harm might have used more effective coping strategies than victims who experienced long-term victimization followed by severe harm. To fully understand the selection of coping strategies, the attention was also paid to the context in which online victimization occurred, i.e. whether online victimization was perpetrated by an aggressor known only online or by someone from victim's school.

## Methods

### Sample

Data were collected via an online survey on 2,092 Czech children aged 12-18 ( $M=15,1$ ,  $SD=1,86$ ; 54,7% females) from a random sample of 34 primary and secondary schools located in the South Moravian region of the Czech Republic.

### Measures

**Cyberbullying experience.** Following the definition of cyberbullying (Belsey, 2009; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010), the respondents were provided with a description of cyberbullying as misusing the Internet or mobile phone to purposefully harm or harass another person. The respondents were asked a dichotomous question, whether or not they had ever experienced anything similar.

**Length of online victimization.** Respondents were asked whether they had experienced any of six forms of cyberbullying (Heirman and Walrave 2008; Nocentini and others, 2010); if yes, they rated on 4-point scale (less than a week; a week to a month; one to six months; longer) the length of online victimization. Those who reported victimization (in one or more forms) lasting for longer than a week were treated as victims with long-term victimization.

**Experienced harm.** To measure harm experienced as a result of cyberbullying, respondents were asked two questions. They reported on a 4-point-scale (Not at all upset – Very upset) to what extent they were upset about what happened to them. Using a 6-point scale (Several minutes, Several hours, Several days, Several weeks, Several months, Longer) they indicated how long they felt this way. Individuals who reported feeling fairly or very upset for a period of several weeks or more were classified as victims with severe harm.

### Coping strategies:

**Retaliation.** Two dichotomous items (I did something similar to the person, face-to-face OR online) were summed ( $r=.48$ ) to measure retaliation. **Avoidance.** To measure avoidant behavior two dichotomous items (e.g. I stopped visiting the web pages where this happened) were summed ( $r=.46$ ). **Seeking advice online.** Respondents were asked a dichotomous question whether they searched the Internet for advice how to deal with victimization. **Social support.** A dichotomous item measuring whether they told someone about it was used. Furthermore, respondents who answered positively were asked to whom they talked to.

### Analysis

Based on a combination of experienced harm and the length of victimization, three groups of victims were differentiated: victims experiencing severe harm and long-term victimization ( $n=115$ ), victims experiencing negligible or no harm and long-term victimization ( $n=201$ ), and victims experiencing negligible harm and short-term victimization ( $n=106$ ). The sample of 422 respondents ( $M=15,27$ ,  $SD=1,84$ ; 68,2% females) was analyzed; for group comparison, chi-square test was used.

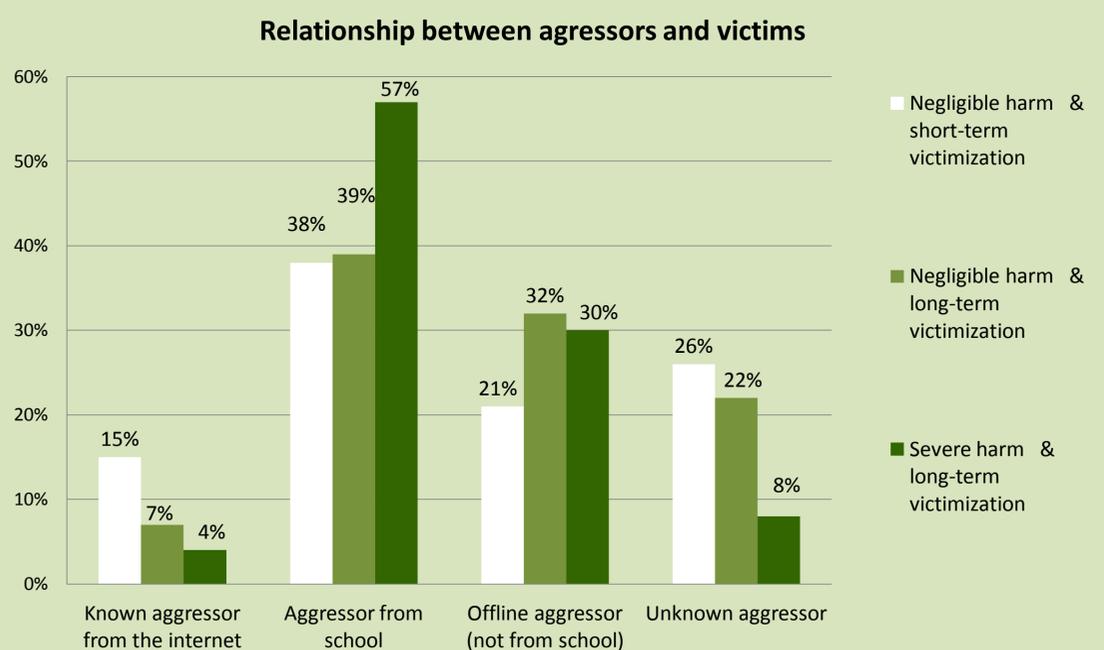
## Results

Table 1. Coping strategies used by three types of victims

	Negligible harm & short-term victimization %(n)	Negligible harm & long-term victimization %(n)	Severe harm & long-term victimization %(n)	$\chi^2(df=2)$
<b>Maladaptive coping strategies</b>				
Retaliation	21 (22)	25 (49)	19 (21)	1.74
Avoidance	20 (21)	13 (25)	31 (35)	15.28***
<b>Adaptive coping strategies</b>				
Seeking advice online	6 (6)	7 (14)	23 (26)	22.01***
Seeking social support	54 (57)	71 (142)	73 (83)	11.77**
Friend	86 (48)	77 (109)	72 (60)	3.46
Parent	32 (18)	34 (48)	60 (50)	17.27***
Teacher	2 (1)	8 (11)	21 (17)	14.59***
Police	4 (2)	1 (2)	8 (7)	6.84*
Administrator	9 (5)	6 (9)	4 (3)	1.07

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Figure 1. Relationship between aggressors and victims.



## Discussion

The findings indicate that on one hand targets reporting severe harm and long-term online victimization scored higher on the avoidance scale than the other types of victims. On the other hand, they were very active in using adaptive coping strategies such as seeking advice online, seeking social support, and telling adult authorities (parents, teachers, and police). Due to a cross-sectional design of the study we cannot distinguish whether avoidant behavior preceded adaptive coping strategies or was a result of ineffectiveness of steps they took. However, the important message is that victims suffering from severe harm and long-term victimization seem not to be passive in seeking social support, nor do they overreact. On contrary, they tend to use adaptive coping strategies.

Looking at the selection of coping strategies from the perspective of the relationship between aggressors and victims, targets reporting severe harm and long-term online victimization were significantly more likely to be bullied by someone from school than the other victims groups, while adolescents experienced negligible harm and short-term victimization perpetrated by an aggressor known from the Internet. Thus, an extent of harm (as a result of online victimization) might depend on whether cyberbullying occurs in the context of school, among the schoolmates.

The findings call for further research which would answer the question why and when victims with severe harm incline to avoidant behavior. The results indicate the need to enhance cyberbullying/bullying prevention and intervention programmes as well as to develop a website with specific instructions how to handle cyberbullying.