

Cyber-Victimization among Higher Education Students as Related to Academic and Personal Factors

Authors : T. Heiman, D. Olenik-Shemesh

Abstract : Over the past decade, with the rapid growth of electronic communication, the internet and, in particular, social networking has become an inseparable part of people's daily lives. Along with its benefits, a new type of online aggression has emerged, defined as cyber bullying, a form of interpersonal aggressive behavior that takes place through electronic means. Cyber-bullying is characterized by repetitive behavior over time of maladaptive authority and power usage using computers and cell phones via sending insulting messages and hurtful pictures. Preliminary findings suggest that the prevalence of involvement in cyber-bullying among higher education students varies between 10 and 35%. As to date, universities are facing an uphill effort in trying to restrain online misbehavior. As no studies examined the relationships between cyber-bullying involvement with personal aspects, and its impacts on academic achievement and work functioning, this present study examined the nature of cyber-bullying involvement among 1,052 undergraduate students (mean age = 27.25, S.D = 4.81; 66.2% female), coping with, as well as the effects of social support, perceived self-efficacy, well-being, and body-perception, in relation to cyber-victimization. We assume that students in higher education are a vulnerable population and at high risk of being cyber-victims. We hypothesize that social support might serve as a protective factor and will moderate the relationships between the socio-emotional variables and the occurrence of cyber-victimization. The findings of this study will present the relationships between cyber-victimization and the social-emotional aspects, which constitute risk and protective factors. After receiving approval from the Ethics Committee of the University, a Google Drive questionnaire was sent to a random sample of students, studying in the various University study centers. Students' participation was voluntary, and they completed the five questionnaires anonymously: Cyber-bullying, perceived self-efficacy, subjective well-being, social support and body perception. Results revealed that 11.6% of the students reported being cyber-victims during last year. Examining the emotional and behavioral reactions to cyber-victimization revealed that female emotional and behavioral reactions were significantly greater than the male reactions ($p < .001$). Moreover, females reported on a significant higher social support compared to men; male reported significantly on a lower social capability than female; and men's body perception was significantly more positive than women's scores. No gender differences were observed for subjective well-being scale. Significant positive correlations were found between cyber-victimization and fewer friends, lower grades, and work ineffectiveness ($r = 0.37-.40$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the Hierarchical regression indicated significantly that cyber-victimization can be predicted by lower social support, lower body perception, and gender (female), that explained 5.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.056$, $F(5,1047) = 12.47$, $p < 0.001$). The findings deepen our understanding of the students' involvement in cyber-bullying, and present the relationships of the social-emotional and academic aspects on cyber-victim students. In view of our findings, higher education policy could help facilitate coping with cyber-bullying incidents, and student support units could develop intervention programs aimed at reducing cyber-bullying and its impacts.

Keywords : academic and personal factors, cyber-victimization, social support, higher education

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