

A Qualitative Study on Cyberbullying and Traditional Bullying among Taiwanese High School Students

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Abstract : Background: In recent years, a particular form of bullying, referred to as 'cyberbullying' has emerged along with the rapid expansion of the Internet, social network services (SNSs) and smart phones. Many Asian countries, including Taiwan, are faced with both the cyberbullying and the traditional form of bullying. This study aims to explore Taiwanese adolescents' experiences, perceptions and opinions regarding cyberbullying and traditional bullying through the perspective of victim, perpetrator, or witness. Method: This is a qualitative study using face-to-face in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured questionnaire among high school students -aged 16 to 18 years- in Taipei, Taiwan. The participants were recruited through convenience sampling from five high schools between June and November 2016. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. Results: Forty-eight participants were recruited, of which, 14 (29.2%) reported had ever experienced bullying. Specifically, 7 participants (14.6%) reported had ever been victims of cyberbullying, 1 (2%) had been victims of traditional bullying, and 6 (12.5%) had been victims of both cyber and traditional bullying. The majority (70.8%) reported had ever witnessed acts of bullying; however, none of the participants recognized had ever been a perpetrator of bullying. Cyberbullying mostly happens on social media (Facebook and Instagram) or LINE instant messaging application, and included upload and sharing of degrading pictures and videos of victims, as well as gossip and mean messages by the perpetrators. The anonymous and public nature of social media groups in schools made it easier to perpetrate bullying. The victim of traditional bullying reported being the target of verbal attack because of his physical appearance. Regardless of the type of bullying, victims reported feeling bad, angry, or depressed as a result of being bullied. Witnesses of both cyber- and traditional bullying cited physical appearance (e.g. having the big/flat bust or big butt, or overweight or obese) and disability as the most reasons of being a bullying victim. Conclusion: Both cyberbullying and traditional bullying had negative emotional and psychological impacts on victims. This study warrants further research to assess the extent of this phenomenon and understand the characteristics of perpetrators, victims, and witnesses to inform the design of tailored interventions using appropriate channels of dissemination.

Keywords : cyberbullying, traditional bullying, social media, adolescents

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