Cyber Bullying and University Students: Behaviours, Opinions and Reactions

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ABSTRACT In this research, a general survey model was used with the purpose of determining the opinions of the students attending the Faculty of Education at a private university in Northern Cyprus on the subject of cyber bullying. The participants of this research consisted of 200 students studying in in this faculty for the 2016-17 academic year. Also, a questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to obtain opinions. As a result of the analyses conducted, it has been determined that approximately half of the students were bullied online and, when cyber bullying occurred, nearly half of the students did not tell their parents. The students claimed that they found it easier to speak to their teachers than their parents. It was understood that they found it easier to talk with their friends if they experienced cyber bullying behaviours, rather than their teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Today, computer technology, which is spreading throughout all areas of society, continues to be rapidly developed with the introduction of many new possibilities, such as fast access to information, easy communication and sharing (Uzunboylu and Karagozlu 2017). Science and technology developments have instigated a new era (Ceker and Ozdamli 2016; Prevalla 2017). The most important feature of this age, which has been called the information age, is the intensive use of information technology and the importance of information production, instead of material products (Ozcan and Bicen 2016). In the societies that are affected by these developments, individuals are required to change their lifestyles in parallel and must adapt to the changes that new technologies bring (Hosseini 2016; Cahill et al. 2017).

The spread of technology and the use of the Internet provides significant opportunities for individuals, as well as certain risk. For example, individuals are at increased risk of being disturbed by others by phone or email, or their email passwords may be decrypted by others. Cyber bullying means the harm inflicted on another person by an individual or group, through e-mail, mobile phone, pager, text messaging service, defamatory websites and defamation involving the use of information and communication technologies. These are considered to be deliberate, repetitive and hostile behaviours (Kagan and Ciminli 2016).

The Internet is a powerful tool for educational purposes (Bagriyanik and Karahoca 2017). Many websites provide information about beneficial resources and events. Students are able to utilize various online libraries to prepare projects and can deepen their knowledge by following international or national publications (Uzunboylu and Tugun 2016). While browsing web pages, children are also at risk of viewing websites that include pornography, drugs, alcohol, various weapons, bomb making, forgery, and websites that could steal personal information and are naturally curious about viewing such material (Mitchell et al. 2005; Yigit et al. 2007; Bicen and Uzunboylu 2013).

The young generation, who constitute a vast proportion of online population, use the Internet to communicate with their friends, to access information about their homework, to check sports results, and to improve their social life skills. The Internet can be accessed at home, at school, or in their friends' homes. Furthermore, a large majority of young people are not supervised by their parents when accessing the Internet. This unlimited access provides young people with the opportunity to influence each other and they are exposed to both positive and negative experiences, one of which is cyber bullying (Kirik 2017; Moessner 2007).

Cyber bullying is regarded as harm inflicted by an individual or group, through e-mail, cell phone, pager, text messaging service, defamatory websites and defamation involving the use of information and communication technologies. This is considered to be deliberate, repetitive and hostile behaviour. Cyber bullying is an electronic form of peer harassment (Aricak 2009; Tuna et al. 2016; Gray 2017).

Other terms that have been used for cyber bullying, including "electronic bullying", "ebullying", "mobile bullying", "online bullying", "digital bullying" and "Internet bullying" are also included in the research. Research on has been conducted on the subject of cyber bullying through mobile phones, instant messaging, chat rooms, pictures and video clips (by mobile phone), mail, web pages (Brody and Vangelisti 2017).

Examples of Reported Cyber Bullying

Eighth grade student, Kylie, is an example of a cyber bullying victim. A friend of the student from another school sent a message to the hockey team using Kylie's online identity, which contained content of a sexual nature. As a result of this incident Kylie was forced to leave the school and enrolled elsewhere (Broache 2006).

Denise from Los Angeles, aged 16, is another example of a young person who has suffered from cyber bullying. Denise's mobile phone number, e-mail address and home address were shared online by her boyfriend. Even though her boyfriend was subsequently arrested, this did not prevent Denise from feeling desperate and disturbed (Strom and Strom 2005).

With the widespread use of communication technologies, cyber bullying is increasing. In a study conducted in New Hampshire, United States, it was found that six percent of young people are bullied (Finkelhor et al. 2000). Pieper and Pieper (2017) emphasized that increasing network connectivity, text messaging, and the ability of students to easily access these systems will enable cyber bullying to continue as classic mobbing behaviour. This will cause the problem to continue to worsen.

The incorporation of many technologies on the Internet permits users to maintain anonymity while conducting cyber bullying, by using nicknames or face masking (Levent and Taçgin 2017). Research is currently being conducted with the aim of preventing the spread of cyber bullying.

Many countries are attempting to combat cyber bullying with the introduction of new laws and policies. For the European Union countries, by 2016, a study report on the growth of this problem has been prepared. This study was commissioned by the Commission on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE Committee), to assess the rapidly evolving phenomenon of cyber bullying among young people and to address the needs of the Directorate for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs for public action in this area (LIBE 2017).

In the United States, it is now illegal to irritate, curse, threaten or repulse others through the Internet or telephone. This behaviour is punishable by a fine or up to two months' imprisonment. Children who suffer from cyber bullying are encouraged to report this to a responsible person with their help of their parents or teachers (Patchin and Hinduja 2000). Those who conduct such acts will continue to do so if they do not receive appropriate punishment.

The National Crime Prevention Council has created online brochures aimed at young people and their families to provide education on the prevention of cyber bullying (NCPC 2014). As a result of the investigation, the National Crime Prevention Council stated that cyber bullying is a problem that should receive attention. The council emphasized that the young people should report the incidents to the authorities, make official reports and help to bring the perpetrators to justice. Parents, teachers and school administrators are encouraged to train young people on how to behave appropriately in the electronic environment.

A study was conducted in the context of the EU Kids Online project (ECO; Livingstone et al. 2011), which investigated 25,142 children and young people aged 9-16 years in 25 European countries, including Portugal. As a result of this research, it was found that twelve percent of children were exposed to cyber bullying via mobile phones and three percent were exposed to bullying while in an online situation. Among the 1,000 Portuguese children and young people surveyed, two percent stated that they were exposed to bullying online and 1.3 percent had bullied others.

Over time, due to the possibility that other types of cyber bullying can also occur and spread, it is necessary for schoolteachers to prepare effective coping skills that will enable them to adapt to the evolving situation. Resultantly, families and educators will become more aware of their re-

sponsibilities and will have effective behavioural patterns that will help them to prevent bullying and reduce the impact of existing bullying. Thus, this research was conducted in order to determine the opinions of the students attending a university education faculty on the subject of cyber bullying.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the general survey model, which is a suitable model for this purpose, was used to determine the views of students in an education faculty in Northern Cyprus on cyber bullying according to their perceptions. According to Büyüköztürk et al. (2008), studies aiming to collect data to determine the specific characteristics of a group are called survey research.

Participants

The participants of this research consisted of 200 students studying at the education faculty of a private university in the 2016-2017 academic year in Northern Cyprus. During the research, convenience sampling was used by the researcher to select students from classrooms in the faculty.

Data Collection Tool and Implementation

In the study, the questionnaire form "Student Opinions for Students with Cyber Bullying", developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. The questionnaire form, supported by the literature survey, was applied after evaluation by experts to ensure content validity. The first part of the two-part questionnaire consists of six questions on personal information (three for gender, age and class level; three for technological tool use) and 13 questions on cyber bullying.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire completed by the students participating in the research were analysed using the SPSS program. Findings are explained by percentage (%) and frequency (f).

RESULTS

Findings Related to Demographic Variables

When the distribution of the 200 students participating in the survey is examined by gender, it is found that 60.5 percent of the students who participated in the survey were male and 39.5 percent of the women were male. According to age range, fourteen percent of the students were 18 years old, 18.5 percent were 19 years old, forty percent were 20 years old, fourteen percent were 21 years old and 13.5 percent were 22 or over. The students were distributed evenly between the different year groups, with 50 students from each of the grades 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Findings Toward Technological Tool Usage

When the distribution of students who own their own computers is examined, it is found that ninety-three percent of respondents confirmed that they do have access to their own computers, while seven percent do not. When the students were asked whether they had access to the Internet, 86.3 percent replied that they do, while 12.7 percent said they do not. When the distribution of students' use of the Internet is examined, 16.5 percent of students said they were online for "less than half an hour", twenty-two percent were "less than 1 hour", 10.5 percent were online for "1 hour", 16.5 percent were online for "2 hours", eighteen percent were online for "3 hours", 2.5 percent were online for "4 hours" and fourteen percent were online for "5 hours or more".

Findings about Cyber Bullying

The distribution for the methods used for cyber bullying is given in Table 1. When the table is examined, in response to the question "Which methods and environments are most frequently used for cyber bullying?", 21.5 percent of the students gave the response e-mail, 28.6 percent said chat environments, 17.2 percent said mobile phone calls, 16.8 percent said text messages 13.8 percent said picture messages and 1.8 percent said Internet calls.

Table 1: Distribution for methods used for cyber bullying

Which methods and environments are most frequently used for cyberbullying?	f	%
E-mail	106	21.5
Chat environment	141	28.6
Mobile phone	85	17.2
Text messages	83	16.8
Picture messages	68	13.8
Internet call	9	1.8

The distribution of students in terms of whether they had been disturbed by cyberbullying is given in Table 2. When the table is examined, it is found that seventy-three percent of respondents answered yes and twenty-seven percent of respondents gave to the answer no to the question "Did anyone disturb (cyberbullying) you through mobile phone or other Internet- enabled devices?"

Table 2: Distribution of students who are exposed to cyber bullying

Did anyone disturb (cyberbullying) you through mobile phone or other Internet-enabled devices?	f	%
Yes	146	73.0
No	54	27.0
Total	200	100.0

When the distribution of the students who had heard that others were suffering from cyber bullying was examined, it was found that ninety-five percent of students answered yes, while five percent answered no to the question "Have you heard that your friends in your school or your group of friends outside have been disturbed by people through mobile phone or Internet- enabled devices?"

When the distribution of students who protect themselves from bullying on the Internet is examined, seventy-nine percent answered yes, while twenty-one percent responded no to the question "Can you protect yourself from bullying behaviours conducted on the Internet?"

When the distribution of the frequency of disturbance on the Internet is examined, fiftyone percent of the students said 1-5 times, twenty-one percent answered 6-10 times, and twenty-eight percent answered "11 times or more" in response to the question "How many times have you been disturbed in the Internet environment?"

When the distribution of students who had disguised their identity online is examined, in response to the question 'Have you introduced yourself as a different person on the Internet", seventy-nine percent of the students answered "Never" and twenty-one percent of them answered "1 to 5 times". However, the existence of students who do maintain their anonymity is noteworthy. In the literature, there are other related studies that emphasize that there are people who present themselves as a different person on the Internet (Çubukcu and Bayzan 2013).

When the distribution of students who feel they can talk to their family in case of exposure to cyber bullying is examined, forty-seven percent of the students said they never speak with their families, eight percent said they could speak very little with their family, seventeen percent could speak a little, twelve percent said they can speak and sixteen percent said they definitely could speak in response to the question "Can you talk to your family about this topic?". The reasons why students do not prefer to speak to their families about cyber bullying should be investigated. Zhang and Zheng (2007) reported in their research that some students could even hide their true thoughts from their families.

When the distribution of students who feel that they can speak with the teachers in case of exposure to cyber bullying is examined, it was found that ten percent of the students said they cannot talk with their teachers, fourteen percent can speak only minimally with their teachers, 23.5 percent can talk with their teachers, 25.5 percent can speak with their teachers and twenty- seven percent said they can definitely speak with their teachers.

When the distribution of students who feel they can talk to a friend about bullying is examined, the answers to the question "Who can you talk to about this easily?" revealed that five percent of the students said they cannot talk to their friends, six percent said can speak a little with their friends, twelve percent said can talk with their friends, twenty-five percent can speak with their friends for the most part and fifty-two percent said they can definitely speak to their friends.

When the distribution of whether the students considered exposure to cyber bullying on the internet to be a problem is examined, the answers to the question "Is it a problem to be disturbed in the Internet environment?" revealed that for six percent of students said it is not a problem, twenty percent said it is a minor problem, 57.5 percent said it is a common problem and 16.5 percent of students said it is significant problem.

When the distribution of the reactions given by the students when they have been disturbed in the online environment is examined, the answers to the question "How would you react if you were disturbed while browsing the Internet?", 18.2 percent of them stated that they would tell their family, 21.3 percent of them said they would tell their friends 22.3 percent of them said they would not tell anyone, while 18.2 percent of them

said that they would disturb the person who had started the cyber bullying. Cyber bullying has also been confronted as a social problem caused by the information age in research on cyber bullying (Narin and Unal 2016).

When the distribution according to the effects on the students' experiences in the case of exposure to cyber bullying is examined, he answers to the question "What would be the impact on your life in the case of exposure to cyber bullying, 37.7 percent stated that "My relationship with my family can be damaged", 26.5 percent of them said "My relationship with my friends can be damaged" and "My relationship with my school can be hurt".

In response to the question "If you have been exposed to bullying in the Internet environment, has this effected your school life?" fifty- five percent of the students answered "No" and forty- five percent answered "Yes". Kowalski et al. (2008) investigated the literature on the effects of cyber bullying in their study of people exposed to cyber bullying, and found that these findings were not influenced by exposure to traditional bullying (depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, social anxiety, poor concentration and poor academic performance).

CONCLUSION

The distribution of students participating in the survey by gender was approximately the same. When the age distribution of the students was examined, it was observed that the majority ranged between the ages of 18 and 21 years. Furthermore, 50 students were selected from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year classes in order to constitute the participants of this research. Almost all of the students were found to own a personal computer. It is understood that most students also have access to an Internet connection. More than half of the students stated that they use the Internet for 2 hours a day or more based on the answers to the question "How often do you use the Internet".

University students said that chat media, email, mobile phone conversations, text message, picture message and Internet call were the environments and tools exposed to bullying behaviours in the Internet environment. Approximately half of the students responded affirmatively to the question of whether they were disturbed through their mobile phone while surfing on the Internet. It is noteworthy that the majority responded "Yes" to the question "Did anyone disturb (cyber bullying) you with a mobile phone or another Internet-enabled device?" It has been found that the majority of respondents answered "Yes" when asked whether they were able to protect themselves from cyber bullying behaviour on the Internet. Many had been disturbed several times already and knew the precautions that should be taken. When the distribution of students who claimed that they disguise their identities online is examined, it is understood that the majority do not choose to follow this path.

In the case of exposure to cyber bullying, nearly half of the students said they could not speak to their parents. Only a minority felt that they were able to speak comfortably in this regard. This demonstrates that there may be disconnections between the students and their families. When the distribution of students in terms of whether they believe that they can speak to teachers about bullying was examined, the students responded that they could talk more easily with their teachers than their parents. It was also understood that they could talk more easily with their friends if they experienced cyber bullying behaviour.

University students emphasised that exposure to cyber bullying in the Internet environment is a significant problem and is becoming more widespread. In this study, the reactions given by the students were investigated in the case of disturbance. The order of priority was almost the same, and that when they are disturbed, "I tell my family", "I tell my teacher", "I tell my friends", "I don't tell anyone" and finally "if they disturb me, I disturb them in return". The students stated that their experiences could be affected by bullying behaviours. Resultantly, it can be seen that their relationships with their family, friends or school life can be affected. In fact, nearly half of the students responded that even their school achievements could be affected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted only with university students. Similar studies can be done in secondary and high school. As a result of cyber bullying behavior on mobile phones, legal regulations on internet crimes should be made. The reasons for the students to speak more easily with their friends and teachers about bullying are to be investigated.

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