

Adults' perceived severity of cyberbullying



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Cyberbullying

- An "aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376)
- Various classification systems
 - Covert or overt nature of acts
 - Electronic medium
 - Types of behaviours



Willard (2007)

- 1. Flaming- 'cyber fights'
- 2. Harassment
- 3. Denigration
- 4. Outing and trickery
- 5. Impersonation, Masquerading or Identity Theft
- 6. Exclusion
- 7. Cyber stalking or cyber threats

Why examine adults?

- Much research focus on children and adolescents
- Interest in adults' experiences and perceptions
 - E.g. Workplace cyberbullying (Farley *et al*, 2015)
 - Relatively little known about their perceptions of severity or likelihood of intervening
- Adults as gatekeepers to interventions



Why perceived severity?

- One's perception of potential harm of a behavior to oneself or others (Chen et al., 2015)
- Of interest as individuals are more likely to intervene in acts they witness online when they consider them to be more severe (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; DeSmet et al., 2012)

Study Objectives

 Study 1: Develop a scale to explore adults' perceived severity of various types of cyberbullying acts using Willard's (2007) framework

- Study 2: Explore perceived severity and likelihood of intervening in cyberbullying using visual scenarios of cyberbullying
 - Also, explored role of empathy, moral sensitivity and moral disengagement as secondary aim

Study 1

- Quantitative, cross-sectional online survey
- Using Willard's (2007) framework, developed 35 items that capture 7 types of cyberbullying
 - E.g. Exclusion 'Someone intentionally excludes you from an online group'; 'Someone repeatedly rejects your friend or follow request on social media'
 - Capturing various nuances of each roughly 5 items per behaviour
- Participants rated each in terms of severity
 - Not severe at all (1) to Extremely severe (5)
- Demographic variables
- Adult social media users (Facebook and Twitter) convenience sampling
 - n=389, aged 18-70 (M=29.14), 67% female

Principal Component Analysis



* 2 items removed due to cross-loading (33 items)

Which was most severe?

- Repeated-measures within-subject ANOVA to compare severity ratings across the four factors.
- Perceived severity ratings were significantly different across the four types of cyberbullying, V=.86, F(3, 365)=767.25, p<.001.</p>
- Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni adjustments showed that differences were significant for all groups (p<.001). Defamation was rated most severe (M=4.37, SD=.56), followed by harassment (M=3.78, SD=.80), pestering (M=2.74, SD=.82) and exclusion (M=2.29, SD=.87).
 - No age differences in perceived severity
 - Females > Males
 - 35.6% ever been victim
 - 11.3% ever been perpetrator
 - 75.3% ever witnessed



- Use of more realistic, visual representation of cyberbullying
- Defamation and harassment (3 scenarios per behaviour)
 - Facebook posts and iMessage represented
- Design criteria of scenarios:
 - Using Study 1 items determine representability and plausibility
 - Definitional criteria of repetition, intentionality and power imbalance as overt as possible
 - Minimal shock value (sufficiently representative as baseline)

Defamation Example

facebook



...



Looks like **Internet** is sending out pics tonight if anyone wants one give her a message 😂 this is what she sent to me



Harassment Example

<	9
	+44
	Message Saturday 21:23
lt's actual you are ju	lly so unhealthy how fat ust saying
	Yesterday 15:49
you look pictures y slept with	like such a base in those you posted, bet you've n so many guys
	can you leave me alone?
hahaha ya chill out	ou're such a loser
no wonde you can't	er you have no friends take a joke







- Quantitative, cross-sectional, online survey
- Adult social media users (Facebook and Twitter)
 - N=122, aged 18-64 (M= 27.9), 71.3% female
- Rate perceived severity (1 not severe at all to 5 extremely severe) and likelihood of intervening (1 not at all likely to 5 highly likely)
- Also self-reported measures of empathy, moral sensitivity and moral disengagement
 - 20-item Basic Empathy Scale-Adults (BES_A; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006)
 - 16-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al., 2009)
 - 8-item Moral Disengagement scale (Moore et al., 2012)

Study 2 – Main results

- No significant difference in ratings between Defamation and Harassment severity (unlike Study 1)
- Severity ratings significantly correlated (r=.487, p<.001) and intervention likelihood ratings correlated across two cyberbullying types (r=.532, p<.001)
- Severity ratings and intervention likelihood positively correlated in both cases:
 - Harassment (r=.438, p<.001)
 - Defamation (*r*=.480, *p*<.001).
- Higher moral disengagement predicted lower perceived severity ratings of harassment
- Older age and lower moral disengagement predicted higher likelihood of intervening in harassment
- Regression models non-significant for defamation

Practical application

- Novel insights into adults' perceptions of cyberbullying
- Self-report and visual scenarios open up future research directions
 - Using these and varying up other factors (e.g. publicity, audience size in experimental designs)
 - More specific adult samples
- Psychological variables important but play potentially different roles for different sub-types?
- Informing adult interventions, priority areas of focus



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Thank you!

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