

The role of emotion regulation and empathy in students displaying cyberbullying

Mujidin¹, Sartini Nuryoto², Husnul Khotimah Rustam³, Alifiana Hildaratri², Daniel Ugih Echoh⁴

¹Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

²Magister of Psychology, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

³Faculty of Nurse and Midwifery, Institut Teknologi Kesehatan dan Sains Muhammadiyah Sidrap, Indonesia

⁴Faculty of Social Science, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia

Corresponding author: mujidin@psy.uad.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received May 7, 2022

Revised January 30, 2023

Accepted February 10, 2023

Keywords

cyberbullying;
emotion regulation;
empathy.

ABSTRACT

Anxiety, anger, sadness, and other negative emotions are the harmful effect of bullying, especially in today's digital era. Many cases of bullying happen through social media, often associated with cyberbullying. Therefore, cyberbullying is increasingly common and requires control as early as possible. This study aims to identify the role of students' emotion regulation and empathy in cyberbullying behavior. The participants are 64 university students who tend to commit cyberbullying, chosen with the cluster random sampling technique. Three measurement tools, cyberbullying scale, emotion regulation scale, and empathy scale, were used in this study. Data were then analyzed with multiple linear regression analysis. Our finding reveals that emotion regulation significantly predicts cyberbullying, but empathy is not predicting cyberbullying. Emotion regulation allows students to keep their composure, control their words and action according to prevailing customs and norms and avoid showing aggression to people. Emotion regulation can help students to break the chain of cyberbullying.

Introduction

Bullying is one of the most common social problems worldwide, including in Indonesia. Bullying behavior is defined as acts of intimidation such as pushing, hitting, kicking, name-calling, teasing in a hurtful way, threats, gossiping, group exclusion, denying friendship, telling lies to isolate others intentionally, and aggression that makes the victim helpless (Dardiri et al., 2020). Cyberbullying is the most prominent social problem in the 21st century, which originates from digital media such as cell phones, computers, or tablets (Muralidharan & La Ferle, 2018). Cyberbullying is characterized by aggressive actions against individuals or groups who cannot defend themselves or are weak (Steffgen et al., 2011). The negative impact of cyberbullying is very distressing for most parties (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2016). Therefore, prevention and curation are needed for cyberbullying as an act of violence (Utomo et al., 2020)

In the 21st century, bullying has evolved into cybercrime via the internet or electronic devices. Threatening comments, accessing and misusing data, and distributing personal information on the internet without permission are all part of cyberbullying (Kowalski et al.,

2014). Cyberbullying is an act of oppression by sending or posting messages meant to criticize, offend, belittle, or intimidate someone through electronic or digital media (Alavi et al., 2015; van Geel et al., 2014). Cyberbullying includes posting harsh words, vulgarity, and insults to others; sending repeated malicious and threatening messages; posting gossip aimed at damaging someone's reputation; pretending to be someone else and making posts to tarnish someone's image; sending or posting confidential information and images to embarrass, excluding and removing someone from social media groups, and stalking someone on social media to send threatening messages.

Cyberbullying has adverse effects, such as increased symptoms of depression and anxiety (Navarro et al., 2015). Therefore, cyberbullying could also be the cause of suicide among teenagers (van Geel et al., 2014). Victims of cyberbullying reported more suicidal thoughts than victims of physical or verbal bullying (Hay & Meldrum, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Schneider et al., 2012). When someone commits cyberbullying, he indirectly commits aggression and immoral actions causing victims of bullying to feel stressed and has suicidal thoughts (Kowalski et al., 2014). Victims of cyberbullying also feel stress and psychological pressure (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). Individuals stressed due to cyberbullying may attempt suicide (González-Cabrera et al., 2017). As well as bullying is often associated with suicidal thoughts because individuals feel intimidated by their environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This intimidation from bullies reduces self-esteem and increases hopelessness and loneliness in individuals, causing victims to consider their lives worthless and think of ending their lives by suicide.

A previous study investigated cyberbullying in children aged 12-14 (Mawardah & Adiyanti, 2014). Meanwhile, this study focuses on individuals aged 20-23 years, a pretty complicated phase as a period of life crisis. Individuals begin to worry about other people's opinions or views of themselves, so they easily respond to other people's responses with aggressive actions. Individuals can be protected from cyberbullying by implementing empathy (Izzah et al., 2019). Past studies found that empathy negatively correlates with cyberbullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013). With empathy, individuals feel the suffering and weaknesses of others, discouraging or preventing them from cyberbullying. Empathy was described using four aspects, warmth, tenderness, caring, and pity (Park et al., 2022). Warmth consists of love and affection given to others. Tenderness is indicated by gentle speech, treating someone well, and nurturing behaviors. Caring included assistance, appreciation, and sharing. Lastly, pity is indicated by pity and sadness when seeing others' difficulties.

This current study contributes more to studying cyberbullying by including emotion regulation as a predictor. Anxiety and depression are among the harmful effects of cyberbullying that require psychological intervention, namely by improving the ability to regulate emotions. Emotion regulation enables individuals to choose situations, then channel attention to responding to problems calmly (Adiyanti et al., 2020). Individuals are more likely to accumulate positive emotions to deal with cyberbullying. Emotion regulation allows individuals to learn and be flexible in stressful situations like cyberbullying (Young et al., 2019). Therefore, emotion regulation and empathy may predict cyberbullying among students.

Method

Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach. A non-experimental quantitative design was applied in this study. Emotion regulation and empathy are tested as predictors of cyberbullying.