Examining relationship between being cyber bully/ cyber victim and social perceptual levels of adolescents

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Absract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between being cyber- bully / cyber-victim and social perception levels in adolescents. In this study, descriptive method was employed. The sample of the study consited of 300 students whom attending different high schools in Trabzon in 2009-2010 school years. 159 students of the sample were boys (% 53) and 141 students were girls (% 47). Cyberbullying Scale and Social Comparision Scale were used to collect the data. Pearson correlation coefficient and independent samples t test were conducted to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed that there was a negative significant relationship between being cyber-bully/cyber-victim and social perception levels. As a result of this, students develop negative thinking both themselves and their social life. Also students who have low social perception being more cyber-bully/cyber-victim. These results were discussed in light of relevant literature and some new direction were given to the further studies.

Key Words: Cyber-bully, Cyber-victim, Social perception, Adolescents.

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Introduction

Today we can see that the number of children and adolescents that use mobile phones, computers and the Internet is increasing. Those individuals communicate with their close friends and able to share pictures, videos and etc through the technological devices. In addition they are able to register themselves and became a member of social websites and Exchange personal details and information with others. Furthermore, they can create personal e-mail addresses and design a personal homepages on the Internet. Many studies recently (Bhat, 2008; Lathouwers, Moor & Diden, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010) concluded that having such kind of access to technology helps individuals to feel the sense of freedom and that leads individuals to behave and interpret the life in an original ways. Technology is dramatically changing in today's world. This fast changing orientation of the technology could bring harms to people as well as it can be beneficial. It is a subject to continuous discussion today that particularly excessive and uncontrolled use of mobile phones, computers and the Internet has negative effects on children and adolescents (Dowell, Burgess & Cavanaugh, 2009). Dombrowski, Gischlar & Durst (2007) emphasize that internet which allows different type of communication, consists of harmful content may have negative effects on children and adolescents.

Being Cyberbully and Cybervictim

In this context, the negative use of technology by adolescents occurs in different ways. From 1990s to 2000s adolescents' bullying behaviors and the background reasons of those behaviors were focus of many studies carried out frequently by many researches. It is stressed that the results of these studies help other researchers to comprehend the offensive behaviors of adolescents which appear in cyber environments (Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). Technological tools such as mobile phones and the internet help individuals to communicate with others indirectly. However, time to times these tools have been used by young individuals for the aim of insulting, threatening, embarrassing etc others. Since then it has became a focus of scientific studies which has raised many questions in minds of the researchers. It is expressed as cyber bullying or technology bullying by many researchers in recent years and there are many attempts to define cyber bullying in broader terms.

Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) explained cyber bullying as the behavior which is carrying similar characteristics of traditional bullying indirectly but it is reiterative and involves

psychological violence so that reason it has differences in the behaviors. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) briefly define cyber bullying as creating deliberate and reiterative harmful content in the electronic environment (violence, insult, etc).

Li (2007) defines it as reiterative and destructive damaging affection which is developed through information and communication technologies such as mobile phones, e-mail, SMS, personal web pages and other. Willard (2004) categorized cyber bullying under seven different headings. Those are; Flaming, Online Harassment, Cyber stalking, Denigration, Masquerade, Outing and Exclusion.

Relationships with Variables

Some of the studies about cyberbullying behaviors concentrate on determining electronic tools used throughout cyberbullying. On this subject Patchin and Hinduja (2006) expressed that during cyber bullying behaviors, mostly computers (e-mail or direct messaging, attacking to personal websites, sending embarrassing content) and mobile phones (threatening and insulting texts) are used by individuals. At this point a question "whether there is a relationship between the uses of computer indirectly the Internet" arouses in mind to answer. Latest statistics regarding the use of the Internet is important to consider. According to September 2009 statistics provided by an Independent research company, the number of Internet users in the world is 1, 733, 993, 741 and in Turkey this number has reached up to 26, 500, 000 (Internet World Stats, 2009) . According to April 2009 data provided by Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) 30 % of homes have access to the Internet in Turkey. Other striking point is that the ratio of the Internet users. According to data provided by TSI, age group of 16-24 is determined as the highest ratio about the use of computer and the Internet. On the basis of these data provided it can be said that cyberbullying is gaining its importance among young adolescents in recent years.

Under the light of those studies it can be seen that individuals who do cyberbullying and exposed to cyber bullying (victims) are in their adolescent years. During adolescent period "intelligence and power" concepts for males, concept of "beauty" for females come forward. In these years foundations of personality (ego) is established. Negative ego perception may cause adolescents to have troublesome feelings such as escaping from people (avoiding other people), not liking self, feeling not being loved and valued (Erkan, 2009).

Aim and importance of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the levels of social perceptions, which is related to living environment, of individuals who do cyberybullying and exposed to it. Related literature review illustrates that social perception levels of individuals has not been investigated in terms of cyberybullying and being cyber victim point of view before. It is thought that the results of the study will contribute to literature.

Method

The study is a survey which is carried out within the scope of descriptive research methodology. Survey methods aim to describe past or contemporary phenomena as it is (Bryman & Cramer, 1990).

Study Group

This study was carried out with 300 secondary school students in city of Trabzon in 2009-2010 academic year. 159 (% 53), of male and 141 female students (% 47), participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools

Cyberbullying Scale (SBS):

This scale was developed by Topçu (2008) with the aim of determining cyberybullies and cybervictims consist of 26 likert type items and two parallel forms. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient variant was calculated as .86. Evaluation is done on the basis of total scores obtained from the scale.

Social Comparison Scale (SCS):

This scale developed by Gilbert and Trent (1995) formatted with 6 items. After that the scale was developed Şahin et al through increasing the number of items from 6 to 18. Items 1 to 6 are likert type. High scores obtained from the scale illustrate positive perceptions of ego, and low scores obtained from the scale negative perception of ego (Savaşır and Şahin, 1997). Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient variant was calculated as .79.

Data Analysis

Obtained data analyzed through SPSS 17.0 software. Firstly, relationship between students' social perceptions level and being cyberbully/cybervictim investigated through

Pearson Momentum correlation variance. On the basis of meaningfulness reached here, independent - t test was used to investigate relationship between individuals high and low levels of social perceptions and being cyberbully/cybervictims.

Findings

Explanation of relationship between students' social perceptions level and being cyberbully/cybervictim

Data about relationship between students' social perceptions levels and being cyberbully/cybervictim are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below:

Table 1. Correlation table about social perceptions levels and being cyberbully/ cybervictim

	Total social perception	Total victim	Total bullying
Total social perception	1		
Total cybervictim	-,198(**)	1	
Total cyberbully	-,176(*)	,498(**)	1
Mean	4,769	0,295	0,312
Sd	0,676	0,304	0,369

*p<0,05 **p<0,01

Results of data analysis illustrate that there is a negative directed correlation between students' social perceptions levels and being cybervictim (r=-0.198, n=184, p<0.05). In addition, as similar to being cyber victim, negative directed correlation between students' social perceptions levels and being cyberbully is determined (r=-0.176, n=184, p<0.01).

Table 2. Independent t test results about social perceptions levels and being cyberbully/ cybervictim

	Social Perception	N	$\overline{X}$	S	sd	*t*	p
Cyberbully	Low	75	9,960	10,748	182	2,075	0,040*
	High	109	6,871	8,577			
Cybervictim	Low	75	10,106	9,303	182	3,305	0,001*
	High	109	6,027	6,347			

*p<0,05

According to the results of data analysis, it was found that there is a meaningful relationship between cyber bullies with high social perception points and low social perception points (t=2.075, p<0.05). On the basis of this result, it is determined that individual with low social perceptions are more cyberbulliers. In parallel to this it was also determined

that there is a meaningful relationship between cybervictims who have high and low social perception points. (t=3.305, p<0.05). According to this result, it can be said that individuals who have low social perceptions are more exposed to being cybervictims.

These results illustrate those individuals who express cyber bullying behaviors whereas their perceptions about self and environment turn out to be negative. This causes individuals to be known by his/her social environment as a negative person due to behaviors' of cyber bullies consist of negative attitudes towards their closer friends (nicknaming, insulting, threatening, etc.). It is for this reason that, individuals are excluded from friendship environment in course of time. This effects individuals self perception in a negative way. As a result individual creates a bad self perception and also loses already created friendship environment. Nevertheless, similar statues apply to cybervictims. Cyber victims develop negative perceptions towards self due to the results of exposed cyberbully behaviors. Those perceptions effect individual's views about social friendship environment which he/she involved in negatively.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is thought that results of this study are very important in terms of identifying current states of individuals who are cyberbullies and cybervictims in the 21st century. Today, technology has many impacts on every aspect of people's lives. However, researchers also demonstrated in recent years that technological developments also bring some problematic issues to human's everyday lives (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009). Developments in information technology, particularly effects people who try to keep up with these rapid developments. Cyber bullying and cybervictims have increasingly been focus of many researchers in recent years. It is thought that this study is important as it attempts to determine variables which predict cyberbullying and cybervictim behaviors.

According to findings of the study, individuals' perceptions of self and closer environment turn out to negative while they show cyberbullying behaviors. At the same time similar circumstances apply to cybervictims. Similar to cyber bullies, cybervictims also develop negative perceptions towards self because of the results of exposed cyberbully behaviors.

Individuals develop foundations of "self ego" during their adolescent periods. Negative self perception, which is developed due to various reasons, may cause adolescents to

have troublesome feelings such as escaping from people (avoiding other people), not liking self, feeling not being loved and valued (Erkan, 2009). Studies show that adolescents value views of people about themselves. Studies reached to results that adolescents find people's views about themselves mostly important when determining self (personal) behaviors (Lindwall and Lindgren, 2005; Nelson, Rubin and Fox, 2005; Phillips, Pinto and Jain, 2004; Tiggemann, 2005). In addition, studies illustrate that while individuals express themselves in the society they greatly care about others' opinions and perceptions about themselves. As much as individual feel that he/she is seen as a respectable and reliable person in the society, he/she respects and trusts to the society at the same level (Christensen, Stein and Christensen, 2003; Hu and Jasper, 2007). As a result, being a person who is teased by friends, nicknamed, embarrassed, causes an adolescent in cyber environments to develop negative self perceptions and deterioration of social perceptions towards the society they live in. Thus, results of this study and related literature support these claims.

Today, the diverse use of information technologies rapidly increases. It is seen that the technology has positive effects on people's lives; on the other hand however, it has also negative effects. Negative impacts of technology is valid for everyone however, perhaps it harms young ones more than others. In order to minimize the harmful effects of technology, young people should be informed and educated about the proper use of technology. Virtual environments are uncontrollable places. So, it is important to keep adolescents in these environments always controlled. First of all parents should feel responsible for their children being cyberbully and cybervictim. Parents should be aware of dangers of technology for their children and inform their children in proper use of technology. A good level of dialogue should be established between children and their parents. In addition, it is thought that some technical actions (filtering) should be taken by parents to prevent children from dangerous environments. Young people who affected negatively from virtual environments should be determined and psychological support should be given. Educational institutions should also be informed and educative seminars and knowledge dissemination for parents and children should be provided in order to prevent adolescents being harmed by cyber technologies.

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