Cybervictimization as a Predictor of Relational Aggression Among Adolescents: Gender, Depression, and Social Support as Moderators

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Introduction

- Cyberbullying, any hostile behavior directed toward an individual or group through technology used for communication (Arick et al., 2008), is a significant problem with adolescents (Cook et al., 2010).
- Adolescents involved in cyberbullying, either as the bully or victim, typically have higher levels of aggression than peers not involved in cyberbullying (Schultze-Krumholz & Scheithauer, 2009).
- Research indicates that boys are more likely to experience direct, overt forms of bullying (e.g., physical aggression, fighting), whereas girls tend to experience more indirect, relational bullying (e.g., Carbone-Lopez, Ebensen, & Brick, 2010; Coie & Dodge, 1998).
- Depressive symptoms have also been shown to be a risk factor for aggressive behaviors, and social support has been shown to help ameliorate aggression (Dutton & Karakanta, 2013).
- Thus, gender and depression may be risk factors and social support may be a protective factor in the relation between cybervictimization and relational aggression.

Current Study and Hypotheses

- In the scheme of research, the phenomenon of cybervictimization is still relatively new. Thus, there is still limited research available with regard to the individuals involved in cybervictimization and the related consequences.
- The literature that is available largely demonstrates that cybervictimization is associated with short- and long-term negative consequences.
- For the current study, it was predicted that cybervictimization, depression, and gender (coded Male = 0, Female = 1) would each positively relate to both parent- and self-reported relational aggression, whereas social support would negatively relate.
- Furthermore, gender, depression, and social support were expected to moderate the relation between cybervictimization and both parent- and self-reported relational aggression.

Method

Participants
- 144 adolescents and their parents
- Adolescents were between the ages of 12 and 18 years (M = 14.90, SD = 1.76)
- Adolescent Gender: 48% male, 52% female
- Parent Gender: 26% male, 74% female
- Adolescent & Parent Ethnicity: 89% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, 5% Other

Instruments and Procedure

Following informed consent:
- Parents completed:
  - Background form
  - Peer Conflict Scale (PCS – Parent Report)
- Adolescents completed:
  - Youth Reported Internet Harassment (YRIH)
  - Peer Conflict Scale (PCS – Self Report)
  - Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)
  - Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS)

Figure 1. Interaction between Cybervictimization and Gender Predicting Parent-Reported Relational Aggression

Figure 2. Interaction between Cybervictimization and Depression Predicting Self-Reported Relational Aggression

Figure 3. Interaction between Cybervictimization and Social Support Predicting Self-Reported Relational Aggression

Statistical Analyses and Results

- Zero-order correlations indicated that cybervictimization, depression, and social support significantly related to relational aggression (from both informants) in the directions predicted, whereas gender did not relate.
- Six moderated multiple regression analyses were conducted to test for hypothesized interactions (cybervictimization and three separate hypothesized moderators predicting parent- and self-reported relational aggression).
- Accounting for gender or social support, cybervictimization remained a significant unique predictor of self-reported relational aggression.
- Accounting for depression, cybervictimization approached significance as a unique predictor of self-reported relational aggression.
- The interaction between cybervictimization and gender significantly predicted parent-reported relational aggression, ΔR² = .04, b = .25, SE = .10, p = .01 (Figure 1).
- The interactions between cybervictimization and depression and between cybervictimization and social support, ΔR² = .06, b = -.03, SE = .01, p = .001 (Figure 2) and ΔR² = .03, b = .003, SE = .001, p = .03 (Figure 3), respectively, significantly predicted self-reported relational aggression.
- The remaining three tested interactions were non-significant.

Discussion

- Cybervictimization, depression, and social support were unique predictors of relational aggression.
- Likewise, significant interactions were found (i.e., highest relational aggression was found when cybervictimization was higher and the adolescents were female, had higher levels of depression, or had lower levels of social support).
- When considering parent-reported relational aggression as the criterion, females appear to be more impacted by cybervictimization. That is, males were largely unaffected by level of cybervictimization and females are more likely to have higher levels of parent-reported relational aggression when faced with higher levels of cybervictimization.
- Considering the interaction of cybervictimization by depression predicting self-reported relational aggression, the data reflect that only adolescents with lower levels of depression were affected by cybervictimization in terms of their relational aggression (higher aggression when faced with higher levels of cybervictimization).
- The interaction between cybervictimization and social support predicting self-reported relational aggression reflects that adolescents with higher levels of social support, somewhat counterintuitively, are more affected by cybervictimization in terms of their relational aggression.
- These findings could be particularly valuable when treating relational aggression in adolescents, emphasizing a need to target mood and relational concerns.
- Furthermore, findings shed light on the importance of being particularly careful to screen for these concerns in females who present with relational aggression.

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