The Student Involvement in Bullying Incidents and Possible Prevention Measures in Leading High Schools in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province

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Abstract

When it comes to traditional school bullying and cyberbullying among adolescent populations, people often hold the stereotype that school bullying hardly occurs in leading schools. In this study, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed online and subjects reported independently to a sample of 119 students from several leading high schools in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China, to analyze students' involvement in traditional school bullying (18.49% self-reported as victims and 4.2% self-reported as perpetrators) and cyberbullying (15.13% self-reported as victims and 8.4% self-reported as perpetrators) incidents to understand the psychology of victims and perpetrators, and suggest possible preventive measures for traditional school bullying and cyberbullying in leading high schools.

Keywords

Traditional School Bullying, Cyberbullying, Leading High School

1. Introduction

According to the data released by UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2018, nearly one-third of students worldwide have experienced bullying in school (UNESCO, 2018). In China, the phenomenon of school bullying has gradually aroused the attention of the community in recent years with various news reports. Traditional school bullying refers to one or more perpetrators who have more strength or social power than the victim and act aggressively against the victim through verbal or other means, causing psychological or physical harm (Nansel et al., 2001). Due to the widespread popularity of the Internet and social media as an important platform for exposing school bullying incidents but also as a key tool used

by school bullies, the high incidence of cyberbullying has become one of the characteristics of school violence in the new era (Zhao, 2018). Cyberbullying is defined as "bullying and harassment of others using new electronic technologies, primarily cell phones and the Internet" (Wang et al., 2019). The high degrees of freedom, anonymity, fast dissemination, and wide spread of Internet speech all facilitate the occurrence and spread of bullying. In addition, cyberbullying can sometimes occur simultaneously with traditional bullying, potentially leaving a negative impact on the bullied that is more difficult to repair. At a time when traditional school bullying and cyberbullying overlap, the main groups of perpetrators and victims are adolescents. Research report on school violence cases released by the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China in 2016 pointed out that high school students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years of age, as well as underage defendants with vocational high school status, accounted for a relatively high proportion of cases (Research Report of the Supreme People's Court on School Violence Cases). Based on stereotypes, it is often assumed that students in schools with high achievers rarely experience or actively lead school bullying and cyberbullying against their peers. This makes it easy to underestimate bullying among leading high school students. A 2016 study had shown that "there is a pattern of bullying incidents, with lower rates in good schools than in poor schools" (Pang, 2016), but in another study in 2017, it was concluded that "… Bullying incidents are also higher in leading schools" (Han et al., 2017). This indicates that there are some contradictory findings in the existing studies on the bullying phenomenon in leading high schools, and the specific situation in different areas at different times remains to be investigated. Meanwhile, to draw social attention to the bullying phenomenon within leading high schools, to provide proper guidance to students, and to actively help victims out of their predicament, this paper focuses on investigating the involvement of students in traditional bullying and cyberbullying in leading high schools in Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, China, and incorporates research to point out possible preventive measures for this group.

2. Methods

Sample survey was used in this study. A total number of 120 voluntary students from different grades of five leading high schools in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province of mainland China as the research subjects, of which 119 were valid. The reason of being decided as invalid is because of the inconsistent answers. This study used the online platform Wenjuanxing to design and distribute the questionnaires (https://www.wjx.cn/). In this questionnaire, the subjects were responding to the contents of the questionnaire when the definition of school bullying as well as cyberbullying had been clarified. The definitions are as follows: School bullying, also known as school violence, refers to a type of bullying in schools where students persist among themselves for a long time and cause fear, physical and verbal malicious attacks on individuals psychologically, and are afraid

to resist effectively because of the power or size inequality between the victim and the bully. Cyberbullying, broadly defined as "bullying and harassment of others using new electronic technologies, mainly cell phones and the Internet", in this questionnaire refers specifically to "online school bullying" between classmates using online platforms such as social media (e.g., QQ, WeChat, Weibo, Tiktok).

Due to the specificity of the study, participants completed the questionnaires in anonymous form. The structured questionnaire was divided into two main sections: First, demographic information: school attended, gender, and grade level; second, various perceptions of traditional school bullying and cyberbullying. This section mainly questions subjects if bullying exists in leading schools and which types of bullying, they believe are more common and severe.

Next part of the questionnaire included whether bullying existed in leading high schools and the severity of school bullying and cyberbullying. Sample question: Do you believe that school bullying does not exist in leading high schools? Participants could choose from strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, average, somewhat agree and strongly agree.

Further questions (3.1 - 3.16) about traditional school bullying included: whether the participant or classmates had experienced or participated in school bullying and its severity and frequency. Skip questions were set in this section, if the subjects had no relevant encounter with school bullying, they could skip questions 3.3 - 3.12 (experiences and details) in this section. Subjects could skip questions 3.14 - 3.16 (consequences) in this section if they had no experience of participating in or leading school bullying. Sample question: In the past year, someone verbally abused and taunted you in school. Participants can choose from: never, sometimes, often, always.

Further questions (4.1 - 4.18) about cyberbullying included: supervision of Internet use by guardians, time spent on leisure Internet use, whether cell phones are brought to school and other questions related to cyberbullying involvement and its severity. This section is also designed to skip questions 4.6 - 4.15 if the subject has not experienced cyberbullying, and questions 4.17 - 4.18 if the subject has not led or participated in cyberbullying. Sample question: In the past year, someone has spread false information about you on the Internet. Subjects can choose from: never, sometimes, often, always, about preventive measures. This section asks participants separately what they see as the most effective measures against different forms of bullying (multiple choice questions), and also sets up fill-in-the-blanks for participants to express their ideas. Sample question: What do you think are the best preventive measures for traditional school bullying? Participants could choose from: giving a precise definition of school bullying, establishing school policies (e.g., rules for punishment), education and awareness in schools, education and intervention by teachers, education and intervention by parents, improving personal qualities, and others (fill in the

blank). At the end of this questionnaire, an area was set up for participants to voluntarily leave their contact information for the follow-up study.

In this study, the statistical reports generated by default from the Wenjuanxing platform, and the Excel software were used as data processing tools, respectively.

3. Result

3.1. Sample Characteristics

Of the 119 subjects in this study, 31.93% were male and 68.07% were female. 54.62% of the subjects attended Nanchang Foreign Language School, 23.53% attended the Attached Middle School of Jiangxi Normal University, and 21.85% came from other leading high schools in Nanchang (Nanchang No. 2 High School, Nanchang No. 10 High School, and the Attached Middle School of Nanchang University). Among them, 28.57% of the students are freshmen and were still in the stage of adaptation and familiarity with the campus environment and interpersonal relationships, 50.42% are sophomores and 21.01% of them are juniors.

3.2. Perceptions of Traditional School Bullying and Cyberbullying

Overall, 53.78% of the subjects believed that traditional school bullying still exists in leading high schools, while 22.69% of the subjects held the opposite opinion, by 23.53% are neutral response. In response to cyberbullying, 65.55% of the subjects believed that cyberbullying exists in leading high schools, while 13.44% held the opposite opinion, by 21.01% are neutral response. Out of 119 samples, 64 thought cyberbullying was more common in key high schools. Moreover, 86.55% of the subjects assessed the consequences of traditional school bullying and cyberbullying as "equally serious," while only 10.92% thought the consequences of traditional school bullying were more serious and 2.52% thought the consequences of cyberbullying were more serious.

3.3. Prevalence of Traditional School Bullying and Cyberbullying

In the case of whether or not a friend or classmate had experienced traditional school bullying, 49.58% of the students responded in the affirmative, while cyberbullying was 5.04% more prevalent. In the case where the victim was the subject, the proportion of those who had experienced traditional school bullying (18.49%) was 3.36% higher than those who had experienced cyberbullying (15.13%). From the perspective of the perpetrators, cyberbullying (8.4%) was 4.2% more common than traditional school bullying (4.2%), meaning that twice as many perpetrators chose to bully their classmates in the form of cyberbullying. Of the 22 subjects who experienced traditional school bullying in the survey, one of them is also the perpetrator of traditional school bullying. And of the 18 subjects who experienced cyberbullying, two of them are also the perpetrators of cyberbullying.

3.4. Reasons Why Bullying Occurs

The causes of bullying, whether traditional school bullying or cyberbullying, were relatively more complex and varied in the eyes of the victims. Typical reasons include revenge (45.45%), desire to gain influence (31.82%), conformity (31.82%), and jealousy (31.82%). Of these, traditional school bullying participants had the most singular reasons, perceiving their behavior as conformity (60%). The reasons given by cyberbullying participants were mainly revenge (40%) and conformity (30%), which overlapped to some extent with the feedback from victims. The options set regarding the characteristics of the Internet (e.g., high freedom of speech, wide distribution, etc.) showed that this was not the main reason for them to join cyberbullying.

3.5. Manifestations of Bullying

3.5.1. Perspectives of Traditional School Bullying Victims

From a survey of victims of traditional school bullying in the past year in the sample, the statistics show that verbal attacks were far more common than physical injuries. Among them, verbal abuse and taunting (90.91%), being spread false information (86.36%), being isolated by others, and ostracism (81.82%) were the most common. Physical violence (18.18%) and damage to property (31.82%), on the other hand, were not as likely to occur.

3.5.2. Perspectives of Traditional School Bullying Perpetrators

For the perpetrators, the forms of traditional school bullying perpetrated overlap highly with the feedback from the victims. Deliberate encouragement and exclusion (80%), name-calling and taunting of others (60%), and spreading false information about others (20%) were all acknowledged. In contrast, some behaviors that were less frequently reported by victims were not acknowledged. Two possible reasons contribute to this situation. First, due to the sample size limitations of this study, abusers who committed these behaviors may not have been surveyed. In addition, the abusers' shyness to admit to behaviors for which they had serious consequences should also be taken into account.

3.5.3. Perspectives of Cyberbullying Victims

Feedback from victims of cyberbullying indicates that receiving malicious comments (100%), being disseminated inaccurate information (94.44%), being deliberately ignored and ostracized (94.44%) were most common. Being disclosure of personal privacy (44.45%) and being threatened anonymously (33.34%), which are more likely to have serious consequences, are relatively less common.

3.5.4. Cyberbullying Perpetrators' Perspective

For perpetrators, abusive name-calling (50%), deliberate isolation and neglect (40%), and malicious comments (30%) were the most frequent behaviors, with a high overlap with victim feedback. Perpetrators of cyberbullying (8.4%) were more open in admitting their behavior compared to traditional school bullying (4.2%). Possible reasons for this include the perpetrator's belief that their beha-

vior does not result in serious consequences or the perpetrator's belief that their true identity will not be revealed.

3.6. Consequences of Bullying Behavior

3.6.1. Psychological Dimension

By comparing the feedback from the perspective of the victims of traditional school bullying with the feedback from the perspective of the victims of cyberbullying, it was found that although the vast majority of victims would feel scared, sad and anxious after experiencing bullying, the victims of traditional school bullying would feel more isolated (66.67%-multiple choice) after experiencing bullying [see as Figure 1].

3.6.2. Behavioral Level

By comparing the feedback from the perspective of traditional school bullying victims and the feedback from the perspective of cyberbullying victims, it was found that more than half of the victims would choose to avoid socializing or talking to their friends about their experiences, regardless of the form of bullying they experienced. Less than 30% of the victims in both situations would choose to tell their parents or teachers, or even not tell anyone. A very small number of students may take extreme measures, such as self-injury and attempting suicide. The biggest difference in behavior between cyberbullying victims and traditional school bullying victims is that cyberbullying victims choose to use the reporting function of the online platform for self-protection, while none of the traditional school bullying victims in this survey chose to report the bullying to school leaders. After a comparison of both the psychological and behavioral dimensions, it can be judged that the consequences of these two types of bullying behaviors are basically equally serious, which matches the responses of the subjects' perceptions of the consequences of bullying in Part 2 [see as Figure 2].

3.7. Prevention and Intervention

The option of "improving personal qualities" was the most important influencing factor in the subjects' eyes for both traditional school bullying (89.08%-multiple
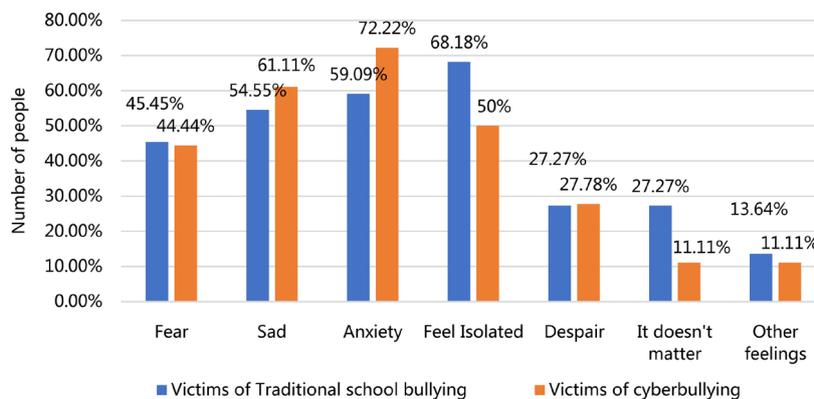

Figure 1. Victims' feelings after experiencing traditional school bullying and cyberbullying.
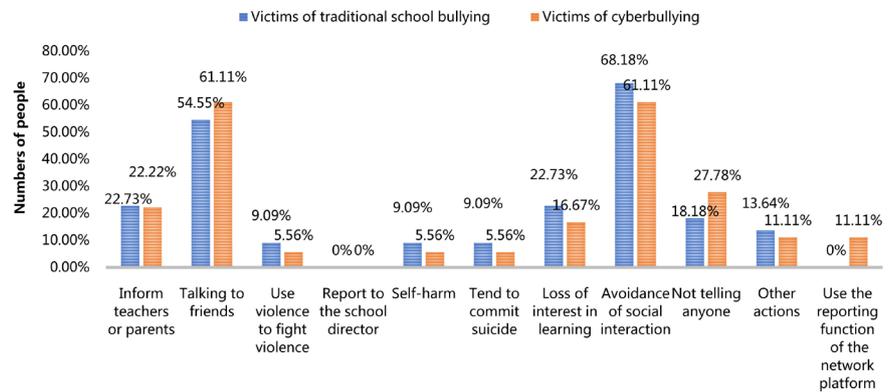
Figure 2. Victims' Reactions after experiencing traditional school bullying and cyberbullying.

choice) and cyberbullying (81.51%-multiple choice) prevention. For traditional school bullying, increasing education and intervention by teachers (66.39%-multiple choice) and parents (57.14%-multiple choice) were seen as necessary. A precise definition (54.62%-multiple choice) of traditional school bullying and the establishment of a comprehensive punishment system in schools (47.9%-multiple choice) were also seen as aspects that would help improve the situation. For cyberbullying, the subjects preferred that online platforms could establish more measures to protect youth, such as strengthen supervision (66.39%-multiple choice) than the efforts of schools and parents (46.22%-multiple choice). This phenomenon is in line with the characteristics of the Internet discussed in the Introduction, and it also proves side-by-side that traditional prevention and control methods have a relatively limited role in the practical application of preventing cyberbullying. The ability to turn off anonymous chatting on their own and giving a precise definition of cyberbullying were also recognized by the subjects.

4. Discussion

This study used a sample of students from selected leading high schools in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China, to explore the involvement of leading high school students in traditional school bullying and cyberbullying, and to try to find more efficient ways to prevent it. Unlike popular stereotypes, in terms of engagement, 49.58% of students reported that their friends or classmates had experienced traditional school bullying, and 54.62% reported that their friends and classmates had experienced cyberbullying. A 2017 study in China (Han et al., 2017) reflected the same trend. "Contrary to the perception that 'students in good schools are better behaved,' students in key schools were 38% more likely to report being bullied." "At the same time, the article also suggests that 'The prevalence of victims' reports of school bullying was 26.10%, while the prevalence of witness reports and perpetrator reports was 28.90% and 9.03%, respectively." From this, it can be found that the probability of reporting that one's buddy or classmate was bullied is greater than the probability of the victim re-

porting it. This was also the case in the present study. Only 28.69% of the subjects reported themselves as victims of traditional school bullying and 15.13% reported themselves as victims of cyberbullying. For better prevention and intervention, the reasons why students in leading schools engage in bullying are also noteworthy. In this study, 60% of traditional school bullying perpetrators engaged in bullying because of conformity, and 40% of cyberbullying perpetrators engaged in bullying because of conformity, which fits with a 2012 domestic study (Cao et al., 2012) that showed that conformity was the second most common reason for perpetrators to engage in cyberbullying. It is worth mentioning that in the case of cyberbullying discussed in this paper, "revenge" is the primary reason for the perpetrator to commit cyberbullying. This echoes the discussion of the overlap between victims and perpetrators of bullying in Part 3 of the results. As the results of the Part 7 showed, subjects in both traditional bullying (89.08%-multiple choice) and cyberbullying (81.51%-multiple choice) indicated the importance of improving personal qualities in preventing bullying behavior. Therefore, prevention should be aimed at improving personal qualities as the goal and students should be properly guided in education to develop positive values, while schools should take the necessary punitive measures. This requires a good and positive partnership between school authorities and students' families. Collaborative home-school measures can also better cope with the problem mentioned in criminology and in neutralization techniques (Kaptein & van Helvoort, 2019) that "most juvenile delinquents are prone to rationalize their crimes and thus eliminate their own guilt." In the case of cyberbullying, it is even more important to disrupt the environment that facilitates the abuser's behavior. Thus, regulation of online platforms, such as sensitive word review, can minimize direct verbal attacks and victimization of victims. At the same time, establishing measures to protect youth, such as turning off anonymous chatting on their own and weakening online anonymity, can help improve and clean up cyberspace. And at the same time, it is crucial to provide the necessary help and diversion to victims. In addition, giving a precise definition of bullying in schools (54.62%-multiple choice) is one of the most popular prevention in terms of student feedback. With a clear definition, this also allows the implementation of sanctions for specific behaviors, and deterrence once students have an understanding of the possible consequences of committing bullying. A 2019 Chilean study (Varela et al., 2018) showed that "Feeling less support from the community can be detrimental to healthy youth development and adolescents' quality of life. Community prevention efforts can thus provide emotional support for youth victims of bullying and cyberbullying." This can help alleviate the fear, sadness, and anxiety of victims mentioned in the conclusion section, and can prevent victims from harming their mental health by avoiding social interaction and not telling their parents or teachers about the follow-up process. Because of this, third-party (e.g., social workers or school counselors) intervention and help become very essential. In addition to school policies and education in the home that can be improved, teachers' attention to such incidents and help for victims,

as well as a positive atmosphere in the classroom, can create a better environment for victims to recover, and through these efforts, the current state of intervention and prevention of bullying can be improved.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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