

Turkish Schools' Readiness for Preventing Cyberbullying

Melike Kavuk-Kalender

Ress. Assist. Dr.

Yildiz Technical University

Faculty of Education

Istanbul 34220, Turkey

mkavuk@yildiz.edu.tr

Hafize Keser

Prof. Dr.

Ankara University

Educational Science Faculty

Ankara 06590, Turkey

keser@ankara.edu.tr

Sanser Bulu

Ress. Assist

Ankara University

Educational Science Faculty

Ankara 06590, Turkey

sanserbulu@gmail.com

Abstract

Cyberbullying is a serious problem among adolescents. Widespread use of digital communication tools is increasing the number of cyberbullying cases. Schools staff should be ready to overcome cyberbullying. This study aimed to determine the awareness levels of Turkish school about prevention of cyberbullying. Turkish educators' awareness of creating anti-cyberbullying school climate, and instituting anti-cyberbullying technological measures was acceptable; but instituting anti-cyberbullying rules and regulations, and anti-cyberbullying educational actives were not acceptable.

Keywords: cyberbullying, cyberbullying awareness, cyberbullying prevention

Introduction

Cyberbullying is defined as a willful and repeated harm inflicting acts, such as taunting, name calling, insulting, gossiping, knowingly spreading computer viruses, sharing someone's photo without their knowledge, sending SMS messages from hidden numbers, threatening, harassing, and intimidating using information technologies. Considering the prevalence of cyberbullying (Wang, Iannotti and Nansel, 2009; Mishna, Kassabri, Gadalla and Daciuk, 2012; Erdur-Baker and Tanrikulu, 2010), its effects on individuals (Belsey, 2006; Beran and Li, 2005; Hinduja and Patchin, 2005), the factors that trigger cyberbullying (Aftab, 2011; Bauman, 2013; Campbell, 2005; Erdur-Baker and Tanrikulu, 2010;) and the legal sanctions, it is evident that cyberbullying is a serious threat that targets adolescents. This problem grows day by day and it causes concern among parents, educators, and school administrators.

Researchers suggested that, most of the schools' staff did not want to involve themselves in cyberbullying cases because they did not wanted to overstep legal boundaries (Willard, 2007). Moreover, most of the schools do not have preventive measures that educate and inform students about dangers and consequences of cyberbullying. The appropriate, ethical and healthy usage of Information Technologies (IT) should be supported, but at the same

time students, school staff and parents must be able to overcome cyberbullying issues that arise because of inappropriate use of IT.

Jager, Amado, Matos, and Pessoa (2010) stated that cyberbullying is a unique type of bullying. For this reason, it is necessary that the studies of fighting with cyberbullying in schools are unique. Brewer (2011) defines cyberbullying as a challenge unlike any other that school leaders and other educators face. According to Huang and Chou (2013), teachers are in a critical position to cope with bullying. Bhat (2008) stated that the prevention and intervention measures for cyberbullying should be established together with school technology experts, managers, teachers, parents and students.

Researchers make some suggestions about how to combat with cyberbullying. For example, Hinduja and Patchin (2009c) emphasized that the work to be done at school in order to prevent cyberbullying should include the dimensions of recognition, prevention and intervention. To recognize cyberbullying is to know what it is, how it occurs, its features like causes, effects or legal consequences, and to analyze the incidents that take place. To intervene effectively in cyberbullying, and clear school principals and rules of cyberbullying must be identified (Slonje and Smith, 2008) and the evidence and details the incidents must be examined.

To prevent cyberbullying it is necessary to provide school-parent collaboration, to design an effective cyberbullying curriculum and to educate school stakeholders about cyberbullying (Cassidy, Brown and Jackson, 2012). Farrington and Ttofi (2010) stated that effective sanctions and disciplinary methods would be useful in reducing cyberbullying. However, some researchers certainly do not suggest discipline and ignorance behavior (Bauman, Rigby and Hoppa, 2008; Yoon and Barton, 2008). DeSmet et al. (2015) suggests activities such as talking to students, working with parents and guidance specialists to cope with cyberbullying. Besides, some researchers emphasize the importance of creating positive school culture, educating school stakeholders, creating school specific principals and taking technological precautions within the scope of cyberbullying prevention studies (Cassidy et al. 2012; Hinduja and Patchin, 2009a; Kowalski, Limber and Agatson, 2012).

Since it is a serious problem targeting students, it is necessary to raise awareness about preventing cyberbullying to all school stakeholders, and this task falls primarily on school staff. In line with this, it is important to establish educators' perception of cyberbullying, their reaction and current bullying experiences, and then, based on these factors, to devise prevention strategies (Huang and Chou, 2013).

There were some resources and studies on evaluating the perceptions, opinions or awareness of educators regarding cyberbullying prevention, and creating specific cyberbullying strategies for the schools, in the literature (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009a; Kowalski et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2006). However, studies have not been conducted to determine the opinions of educators in Turkey regarding cyberbullying prevention. For this reason, the main goal of this study was to determine the educators' (e.g., school administrator, ICT teacher or school counselor) awareness regarding cyberbullying prevention. Following research questions was used to achieve this goal.

1. What are the opinions of educators on creation of anti-cyberbullying school climate?
2. What are the opinions of educators on construction of anti-cyberbullying principles?
3. What are the opinions of educators on creation of anti-cyberbullying curriculum and education?
4. What are the opinions of educators on taking anti-cyberbullying technological precautions?

Methodology

The study was conducted using survey method, and quantitative data was collected. The sample was selected among middle schools and high schools in Turkey. The population was 22249 schools. Stratified sampling technique was used to choose the sample schools. Using Cochran's (1977) stratified sampling formula, the sample size of 378 was determined. Turkish Statistics Institutes' (TSI) statistical region determination classification and provinces' information technology crime rates was used. According to TSI's classification, there are 12 regions in Turkey, and Istanbul province represented a region by itself. The province with the highest information technology crime rate and the province with the lowest information technology crime rate was selected from the remaining 11 regions; 23 provinces in total included in the study. The study was conducted on 1431 schools; and 2586 educators who were employed in these schools at these provinces participated. If there was an ICT teachers and/or school counselors at these schools and at least one school administrator participated from each school. 57.1 % of the participants were school administrators, (f=1477), 20.1% were school counselors (f=521), 19.1% were ICT teachers (f=495), and 3.6% were other teachers (f=93).

Data were collected using "Questionnaire for Cyberbullying Awareness at School" developed by (Keser and Kavuk, 2015). The questionnaire has 51 items in three dimensions, which are recognition, prevention, and intervention of cyberbullying. Prevention dimension had four sub dimensions: the creation of an anti-cyberbullying school culture, the creation of an anti-cyberbullying curriculum and education, the construction of specific anti-

cyberbullying principles, and taking technological precautions. In this study, the four sub dimensions and the 29 items of prevention dimension were used for data collection. Each dimension and each item was analyzed separately.

The data were collected in electronic form. Permissions and approvals for human subject research were granted by Ministry of Education and University Ethics Board. Schools were contacted via e-mail, phone and if possible with meetings and informed about the study and their participation to the online survey was requested. Survey submissions that met the ethical standards were analyzed. Data were analyzed using mainly frequency (f) and percentage. The answers given by the educators were accepted as clues to the readiness of the schools for preventing cyberbullying and the findings were discussed in this way.

Findings

Regarding the first research question, educators' opinions on *the creation of anti-cyberbullying school culture* sub dimension were analyzed. Accordingly, 72.3 % of the educators reported that they believe students would report cyberbullying incidents to school staff; 82 % of the educators said that students were reminded regularly about reporting cyberbullying incidents; 68.3 % of the educators claimed that there were activates at their schools to show students that cyberbullying was not cool. The majority of educators (93.3%) stated students know that the inappropriate use of technology will not be ignored by the school management.

For the second research question, educators' opinions on *the creation of anti-cyberbullying policies* sub dimension were examined. Only 47.5% of the educators stated that their schools have a clear anti-cyberbullying policy; 57.8 % of the educators reported that they had anti-cyberbullying rules and regulations; just 22.6% of the educators claimed that these rules and regulations were known by the parents; almost half of the educators gave negative response or stated that they had no information regarding these items.

About the third research question, *the creation of an anti-cyberbullying curriculum and education* sub dimension were investigated. According to this, approximately 40% of educators stated that combating cyberbullying is not a part of the curriculum in the schools, or that they do not have knowledge on this subject. 65.5% of the educators thought teachers at their schools were adequate to handle cyberbullying, 50.7% of the educators thought the students at their schools were adequate to handle cyberbullying, and only 22.8% of the educators thought the parents of the students at their schools were adequate to handle cyberbullying. On the other hand; 43.3% of the educators reported that there were educational activities towards the students at their schools; 37.1 % of the educators reported that there were educational activities towards teachers at their schools; and 35% of the educators reported that there were educational activities towards the parents at their schools. However, 13.7% of the educators stated that the school staff does not organize any educational activities for students; 31.2% said there are no educational materials for teachers; and 40.4% believe there are no study materials for families. 78% of the educators claimed that school staff are aware of their responsibility for measures to be taken around the school to cope with cyberbullying. Most of the educators (73.8%) stated that they did not use peer mentoring in their schools to educate student about cyberbullying, or they have no idea on this issue. 60.9% of the educators think that students learn about cyberbullying from ICT teachers, 58.7% from school administrators, 57.1% from school guidance teachers, 23.4% from family and 21.6% from friends.

Regarding the fourth research question, educators' opinions on *the taking anti-cyberbullying technological precautions* sub dimension were viewed. The majority of the educators reported that schools' networks had internet monitoring (73.3%) and content monitoring (55.2%) software/hardware. 87.4% of the educators reported that they had antivirus software; and 87% of the educators reported that they were using government sanctioned safe internet service. 95.1% of the educators declared that they avoid publishing the students' personal information on the school website.

Discussion

Educators' opinions on the first sub dimensions show that the schools' level of readiness concerning *creating anti-cyberbullying school culture* is found to be generally high. Creating a school atmosphere where cyberbullying behaviors would never be ignored (Hinduja and Patchin, 2013) and creating a positive school culture in which cyberbullying is not popular among the student (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009b) is crucial in preventing cyberbullying. In our research, educators claimed they work to create such a school culture and environment. The vast majority of educators think that cyber victim students would report the incident to a teacher and they stated students are regularly reminded that they should seek help from teachers in such cases. Although similar results can be found in research conducted among educators, the situation is quite different from the students' perspective. In Choucalas's study (2013), the majority of the school administrators and teachers thought that students would report cyberbullying incidents, while nearly half of the students said they would report a cyberbullying incident.

The readiness level of the schools concerning *the creation of anti-cyberbullying policies* sub dimension is found to be generally low. Creating clear and strong anti-cyberbullying policies, principles and rules in schools is important to combat cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009a; Kennedy, Russom and Kevorkian, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2012; O'Moore and Minton, 2005). However, in our study, it can be concluded that the majority of the schools does not have a clear cyberbullying policy, principal or rule, or any policy or set of rules specific to cyberbullying. Although researchers emphasized that the rules and principals of traditional bullying do not work in cyberbullying (Shariff, 2005); in a similar study to ours, it is found that schools have no principles specific to cyberbullying; and educators have determined that the school bullying principles can also be used in cyberbullying incidents (Ryan, Kariuki and Yilmaz, 2011).

The readiness level of the schools concerning *the creation of an anti-cyberbullying curriculum and education* sub dimension is also found to be generally low. Educators' answers showed that cyberbullying is not included in almost half of the schools' curriculum or educational programs. Nevertheless, educators think that they are qualified to cope with cyberbullying. In the literature, there are studies that obtained similar results and obtained different results. For example, Choucalas's study (2013), more than half of the teachers (52%) and more than two-thirds of the school administrators (70%) stated that the teachers knew how to recognize cyberbullying incidents. On the other hand, in another study, only 22.8% of the educators found themselves suited to cope with bullying (DeSmet et al., 2015). Schools have an important role in helping students, teachers, and families prepare for cyberbullying (Bauman et al., 2008; Belsey, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2012). Although educators find themselves capable, while they evaluate the families and children as incompetent, all school stakeholders must be educated about cyberbullying. Nonetheless, the results obtained from our research show that there are very few cyberbullying educational activities, especially for families and students, or that such activities are not organized at all. Prevention studies related to cyberbullying should be conducted not only at school but also outside school, and geared toward the community (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009b). Researchers, on the other hand, mention the importance of peer aid in informing students about cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009b; Kowalski et al., 2012). The results of our research show that school environment is involved in cyberbullying prevention studies in most schools, while the peer-mentoring method is not used.

Educators' opinions on the fourth sub dimensions show that the schools' level of readiness concerning *taking anti-cyberbullying technological precautions* is found to be generally high. To prevent students' access to specific websites or software as part of the cyberbullying prevention efforts, additional software could be installed on computers at schools (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009b). Our results show that most of the schools had taken hardware/ software precautions on the internet, network and on their computers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that most of the schools in Turkey are ready to address cyberbullying, to the extent of creating an anti-cyberbullying school culture and taking technological precautions; however, especially from the creating anti-cyberbullying curriculum and education and creating anti-cyberbullying policies standpoint, there is a lack of information and study.

Researchers should concentrate on conducting comparative studies that gathered students, parents, and educators. There is also need for studies on awareness of recognition and intervention of cyberbullying cases, together with improving this awareness with educational interventions. School themselves could also engage in self-evaluation studies on overcoming cyberbullying and institute policies to improve their anti-cyberbullying standing. Schools can start custom programs for their schools working together with universities and experts in the field.

References

- Aftab, P. (2011). *A parent's guide to cyberbullying*. 02.10.2014, <http://www.wiredsafety.net>.
- Bauman, S. (2013). Cyberbullying: what does research tell us? *Theory Into Practice*, 52, 249–256.
- Bauman, S., Rigby, K. and Hoppa, K. (2008). US teachers' and school counsellors' strategies for handling school bullying incidents. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 28, 837-856.
- Belsey, B. (2006). *Cyberbullying: An emerging threat to the "always on" generation*. 09.10.2009, <http://www.cyberbullying.ca>.
- Beran, T. and Li, Q. (2005). Cyber-harassment: A study of new method for an old behaviour. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 32, 265-277.

- Bhat, C. S. (2008). Cyber bullying: Overview and strategies for school counsellors, guidance officers, and all school personnel. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 18(1), 53-66.
- Brewer, E. A. (2011). *Fighting fire with fire: The use of a multimedia webQuest in increasing middle-school students' understandings of cyberbullying* (Doctorate dissertation). Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.
- Campbell, M.A. (2005). Cyber bullying: An old problem in a new guise? *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 15, 68-76.
- Cassidy, W., Brown, K. and Jackson, M. (2012). 'Under the radar': Educators and cyberbullying in schools. *School Psychology International* 33(5) 520–532.
- Choucalas, V. Z. (2013). *Cyberbullying and how it impacts schools* (Doctorate dissertation). Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana.
- Cochran, W. G. (1977), *Sampling Techniques*, Third Edition, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- DeSmet, A., Aelterman N., Bastiaensens, S., Cleemput, K. V., Poels, K., Vandebosch, H.,...Bourdeaudhuij, I.D. (2015). Secondary school educators' perceptions and practices in handling cyberbullying among adolescents: A cluster analysis. *Computers & Education* 88, 192-201.
- Erdur- Baker, Ö. and Tanrikulu, İ. (2010). Psychological consequences of cyber bullying experiences among Turkish secondary school children. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2 (2010), 2771–2776.
- Farrington, D.P. and Ttofi, M.M. (2010). *School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization*. 14.03.2015, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/229377.pdf>.
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J. W. (2005). *Research summary: cyberbullying victimization. preliminary findings from an online survey of Internet-using adolescents*. 04.10.2009, <http://www.cyberbullying.us>.
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J. W. (2009a). *Bullying beyond the schoolyard: Preventing and responding to cyberbullying*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J. W. (2009b). *Cyberbullying fact sheet: What you need to know about online aggression*. 15.02.2010, Cyberbullying Research Center, <http://www.cyberbullying.us>
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J. W. (2009c). *Preventing cyberbullying: top ten tips for educators*. 12.09.2011, Cyberbullying Research Center, <http://www.cyberbullying.us>
- Huang, C.J. and Chou, C. (2013). Revisiting cyberbullying: perspectives from Taiwanese teachers. *Computers & Education*, 63, 227-239.
- Jager, T., Amado, J., Matos, A. and Pessoa, T. (2010). Analysis of experts' and trainers' views on cyberbullying. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 20, 169–181.
- Kennedy, T., Russom, A. and Kevorkian, M. (2012). Teacher and administrator perceptions of bullying in schools. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 7(5), 1-12.
- Keser, H. and Kavuk, M. (2015). Developing a questionnaire for cyberbullying awareness at school. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 23(1), 17-30.
- Kowalski, R., Limber, S. and Agatston, P. (2012). *Cyber-bullying: Bullying in the digital age*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mishna, F., Kassabri, M.K., Gadalla, T. and Daciuk, J. (2012). Risk factors for involvement in cyber bullying: Victims, bullies and bully–victims. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 63–70.
- Mishna, F., MacFadden, R., Gadalla, T., Daciuk, J., Solomon, S. and Cook, C. (2006). Cyber bullying survey: school summary report. 22.07.2012, <http://www.governmentevents.ca/ypo2008/presentations/634.pdf>.
- O'Moore A.M. and Minton S.J. (2005). An evaluation of the effectiveness of an anti-bullying programme in primary schools. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 31, 609–622.
- Ryan, T., Kariuki, M. and Yilmaz, H. (2011). A comparative analysis of cyberbullying perceptions of preservice educators: Canada and Turkey. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 10 (3).
- Shariff, S. (2005). Cyber-dilemmas in the new millennium: school obligations to provide student safety in a virtual school environment. *McGill Journal of Education*, 40 (3), 457-477.
- Slonje, R. and Smith, P. K. (2008). Cyberbullying: Another main type of bullying? *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 49(2), 147–154.
- Wang, J., Iannotti, R. J. and Nansel, T. R. (2009). School bullying among adolescents in the United States: Physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45, 368–375.
- Willard, N. (2007). *Educator's guide to cyberbullying and cyberthreats*. Center for Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet. 17.10.2009, <http://www.cyberbully.org/>.
- Yoon, J. S. and Barton, E. (2008). The role of teachers in school violence and bullying prevention. In T. W. Miller (Ed.), *School violence and primary prevention* (pp. 249-275). New York: Springer.