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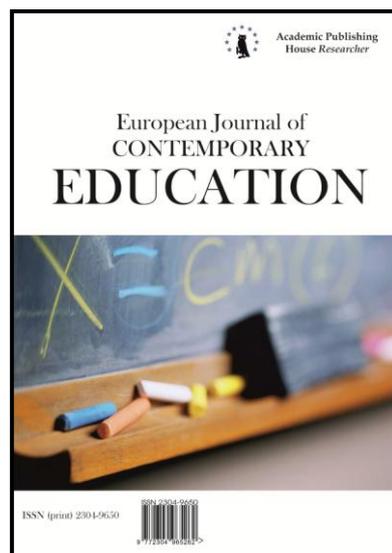
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Cyberbully and Victim Experiences of Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of different types of cyber bullying, the ways in which cyber bullying occurred, whether the identity of cyber bullies were known, and reaction to being cyber bullied among pre-service teachers. Relationships between gender and likelihood of being a cyber bully/victim were also investigated. Using a questionnaire based on the Cyber Bully and Victim Scale developed by [1], males were found to engage in cyber bullying more than females. Cyber bullying mainly occurred through e-mail, text messages, and phone calls. Although most cyber bullying victims talked with others about their experience, most cyber bullies did not talk about their harmful behavior to others. Victims often did not know the cyber bully and ignored the cyber bullying when it occurred.

Keywords: cyber bullying, cyber bully, cyber victim, cyber crime, pre-service teachers.

Introduction

In the current digital age, constant interaction with the internet via computers, tablets, and mobile phones is a normal way of life for children, adolescents, and young adults. For young, technologically advanced generations, e-mailing, text messaging, chatting, blogging, using search engines, online gaming, and participating in social networks are vital activities. Although young people use the internet for entertainment, education, and other socially beneficial activities, internet activity can also be abusive and result in material and moral damage. Thus, the benefits and advantages of technology may go hand-in-hand with harmful outcomes. Computer viruses, hacking, pornographic web sites, spam, and cyber bullying are some of the most disadvantageous outcomes of technology. Cyber bullying, which is the focus of the present study, is a serious danger for young people. According to recent research by [2], cyber bullying is commonly encountered in age groups ranging from high school to university students.

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Bullying has evolved with the popularization of information and communication devices, with cyber-bullying being that which occurs in virtual environments. Cyber bullying has been defined in several different ways. For instance, [3] define cyber-bullying as a deliberate behavior carried out repeatedly over time that inflicts nontrivial psychological and emotional pain on the victim. [4] define cyber-bullying as a form of covert psychological bullying in which electronic devices such as e-mail, text messages, video clips, instant messaging, photos, and personal websites are repeatedly used to convey hostility with the intent to harm another person. The Wired Safety organization considers cyber-bullying as the intentional and repetitive targeting of one young person by another young person using the internet or other interactive and digital technologies in a way that includes torture, threat, harassment, or humiliation [5]. The International Crime Prevention Council defines cyber-bullying as sending messages or images related to the target person to other people via computers, mobile phones, or other devices to cause harm or embarrassment [6]. [7] Considers cyber-bullying to include the sending or posting of harmful information using digital technology to socially oppress another person. [8] Describes cyber-bullying and other activities that harm those using cyber technologies as the “black face of technology.” In light of these definitions, important distinctions have been noted between cyber-bullying and physical bullying. In particular, [9] and [10] describe cyber-bullying as a hidden activity. Therefore, cyber-bullying can be considered a type of bullying performed repetitively and secretly within both dyadic and group virtual interactions that causes psychological damage to the victim.

According to the definitions, cyber-bullying individuals have efficiently used all opportunities of informatics. Having millions of internet and mobile phone users all over the world and connecting to the internet through several tools are indicators that the potential for cyber bully and cyber victim is fairly high. The masterful use of information technology by children and the young facilitates individuals in this age group to be cyber bully/victim.

When analyzing the literature, it should be observed that the studies have been mainly conducted with primary school, secondary school, high school and university students ([11-34]). Part of this study focuses on the relationship between cyber-bullying and demographic characteristics, and another part on the investigated relationship between cyber-bullying and features such as academic success, self-esteem, loneliness, aggressiveness.

Although there are numerous studies conducted with children and young people, it was not observed that there is a study conducted with prospective teachers. It is important to determine the experience of cyber-bullying of the teachers, because of being a role model for children and young people in education, and as part of the main factor to prevent unwanted behavior such as cyber bullying.

For that reason, pre-service teachers created the sample of the research. Within the scope of the research, answers to the questions below were sought:

- 1) How often have you been exposed to cyber bullying?
- 2) In what ways have you been exposed to cyber bullying?
- 3) With whom did you talk about your exposure to cyber bullying?
- 4) Did you know the cyber bully?
- 5) What was your reaction to being cyber bullied?
- 6) How often have you engaged in cyber bullying?
- 7) In what ways did you engage in cyber bullying?
- 8) Did you talk about your engagement in cyber bullying with anyone?
- 9) With whom did you talk about your engagement in cyber bullying?
- 10) Does the rate of being a cyber-victim differ according to the gender of students?
- 11) Does the frequency of being a cyber-victim differ according to the gender of the students?
- 12) Does the rate of cyber-bullying differ according to the gender of the students?
- 13) Does the rate for the frequency of cyber-bullying differ according to the gender of the students?

Method

Participants

The research sample included 199 randomly chosen students enrolled in the Trakya University Faculty of Education. All students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Cyber bullying questionnaire

A 10-item questionnaire was developed by the researcher to obtain information on student gender and cyber bullying experiences. This questionnaire was based on the Cyber Bully and Victim Scale previously developed by [1], which includes two sections with three dimensions and 19 questions. Questions about experience as a cyber victim were asked in the “I was exposed to cyber bullying” section, and questions about experience as a cyber bully were asked in the “I engaged in cyber bullying” section. Each section included three dimensions: “sexual bullying in a virtual environment,” “obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment,” and “spreading rumors in a virtual environment.” Because the scale was previously used in another age group, Cronbach’s alpha values were calculated for this study. The values indicated that the reliability of the scale was acceptable (Table 1).

Table 1. Cyber bully and victim scale reliability coefficients

	Cronbach’s alpha
Sexual bullying in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	0.825
Obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	0.890
Spreading rumors in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	0.872
General cyber victim	0.899
Sexual bullying in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	0.833
Obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	0.826
Spreading rumors in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	0.848
General cyber bully	0.856

Statistical Analysis

Data were evaluated using descriptive statistics [e.g., number, percentage, average, standard deviation (SD)]. Kormogrov-Smirnov Normal Distribution tests determined that variables were normally distributed. Comparisons between genders were performed using Mann Whitney U and Chi-square tests. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Of the 199 pre-service teacher-students, 118 were female, and 81 were male (Table 2).

Table 2. Participant gender

	N	%
Gender Female	118	59.3
Male	81	40.7

Average general cyber victim score was 22.327 ± 5.579 , and average general cyber bully score was 20.141 ± 3.266 (Table 3).

Table 3. Average general cyber bully/victim scores

	N	Avg.	SD	Min.	Max.
General cyber victim score	199	22.327	5.579	19.000	52.000
General cyber bully score	199	20.141	3.266	19.000	43.000

Considering both males and females, 13.6% of students were exposed to cyber bullying once, 8.0% were exposed twice, 5.5% were exposed three times, and 12.1% were exposed four or more times (“*How often have you been exposed to cyber bullying?*”; Table 4.1).

Exposure to cyber bullying occurred in many different ways, including e-mail (24.1%), SMS (15.1%), phone calls (14.1%), chatting (13.6%), embarrassing or humiliating notes on social networking sites (5.5%), embarrassing or humiliating pictures/videos on social networking sites (1.5%), and online forums (1.0%) (“*In what ways have you been exposed to cyber bullying?*”; Table 4.1).

Students were most likely to talk about their exposure to cyber bullying with friends (34.2%), although some had also talked with siblings (9.5%), parents (7.5%), the police (3.5%), teachers (1.5%), and prosecution officers (1.5%) (“*With whom did you talk about your exposure to cyber bullying?*”; Table 4.1).

Most students reported that they did not know the individuals who cyber bullied them (64.1%) (“*Did you know the cyber bully?*” Table 4.1).

In response to being the victim of cyber bullying, many students reported that they ignored the cyber bullying (48.7%). However, some told friends about the experience (19.2%), some reacted in the same manner (i.e., cyber bullied in return; 15.4%), and some reacted in other ways (16.7%) (“*What was your reaction to being cyber bullied?*”; Table 4.2).

72.9% of students had never engaged in cyber bullying, 15.6% had engaged in cyber bullying once, and 11.6% had engaged in cyber bullying twice or more (“*How often have you engaged in cyber bullying?*”; Table 4.2), indicating that a large proportion of teacher-students had also engaged in cyber bullying.

Engagement in cyber bullying also occurred in many different ways, including embarrassing or humiliating notes on social networking sites (11.1%), text messages (10.6%), embarrassing or humiliating pictures/videos on social networking sites (10.6%), chatting (8.0%), phone calls (7.5%), online forums (7.0%), e-mail (6.5%), and multimedia messages (6.0%) (“*In what ways did you engage in cyber bullying?*” Table 4.2).

Of the 54 students who had engaged in cyber bullying, most reported that they did not talk with anyone about their cyber bullying (64.8%) (“*Did you talk about your engagement in cyber bullying with anyone?*” Table 4.2). However, some students talked about their cyber bullying with friends (72.2%), siblings (61.1%), teachers (61.1%), or parents (59.3%).

Table 4.1. Distribution of cyber bullying questionnaire responses

		N	%
How often have you been exposed to cyber bullying?	Never	121	60.8
	Once	27	13.6
	Twice	16	8.0
	Three times	11	5.5
	Four times or more	24	12.1
In what ways have you been exposed to cyber bullying?	Text message (SMS)	30	15.1
	Multimedia message (MMS)	3	1.5
	E-mail	48	24.1
	Chat	27	13.6
	Online forum	2	1.0
With whom did you talk about your exposure to cyber bullying?	Phone call	28	14.1
	Embarrassing/humiliating notes on social networking sites	11	5.5
	Embarrassing/humiliating pictures/videos on social networking sites		
With whom did you talk about your exposure to cyber bullying?	Parent	15	7.5
	Sibling	19	9.5
	Friend	68	34.2
	Teacher	3	1.5

	Police	7	3.5
	Prosecution officer	3	1.5
Did you know the cyber-bully?	Yes	28	35.9
	No	50	64.1

Table 4.2. Distribution of cyber bullying questionnaire responses

		N	%
What was your reaction to being cyber bullied?	Cyber bullied in return	12	15.4
	Told friends	15	19.2
	Ignored the incident	38	48.7
	Other	13	16.7
How often have you engaged in cyber bullying?	Never	145	72.9
	Once	31	15.6
	Twice or more	23	11.6
In what ways did you engage in cyber bullying?	Text message (SMS)	21	10.6
	Multimedia message (MMS)	12	6.0
	E-mail	13	6.5
	Chat	16	8.0
	Online forum	14	7.0
	Phone call	15	7.5
	Embarrassing/humiliating notes on social networking sites	22	11.1
Did you talk about your engagement in cyber bullying with anyone?	Yes	19	35.2
	No	35	64.8
With whom did you talk about your engagement in cyber bullying? (n=54)	Parent	32	59.3
	Sibling	33	61.1
	Friend	39	72.2
	Teacher	33	61.1
	No one	124	62.3

Obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment (cyber victim) score was significantly higher in female students than in male students ($U=4016.50$, $p=0.034$; Table 5), indicating that females were more exposed to cyber bullying than males. Also, sexual bullying in a virtual environment (cyber bully) score was significantly higher in male students than in female students ($U=4059.50$, $p=0.001$; Table 5), indicating that males exhibited higher rates of sexual bullying in virtual environments than females.

Table 5. Gender differences in cyber bully/victim scores

	Group	N	Avg.	SD	U	P
Sexual bullying in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	Female	118	8.017	1.978	4609.500	0.621
	Male	81	8.000	2.080		
Obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	Female	118	9.932	3.134	4016.500	0.034
	Male	81	9.432	2.793		
Spreading rumors in a virtual environment (cyber victim)	Female	118	4.729	1.781	4364.500	0.162
	Male	81	4.383	0.995		
General cyber victim	Female	118	22.678	5.920	4298.000	0.207
	Male	81	21.815	5.035		
Sexual bullying in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	Female	118	7.178	1.001	4059.500	0.001
	Male	81	7.556	1.492		

Obstruction and inflicting harm in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	Female	118	8.398	1.468	4634.500	0.555
	Male	81	8.654	1.831		
Spreading rumors in a virtual environment (cyber bully)	Female	118	4.271	1.043	4641.000	0.517
	Male	81	4.358	1.288		
General cyber bully	Female	118	19.847	2.769	4418.000	0.217
	Male	81	20.568	3.857		

There was no significant relationship between gender and frequency of exposure to cyber bullying (i.e., “How often have you been exposed to cyber bullying?”; $X^2=8.162$, $p=0.086$; Table 6), suggesting that males and females do not differ in frequency of being a cyber victim.

Table 6. Gender differences in frequency of exposure to cyber bullying

Frequency of exposure to cyber bullying	Gender			X ² /p	
	Female	Male	Total		
Never	Number	74	47	121	$X^2=8.162$ $p=0.086$
	Percent	62.7	58.0	60.8	
Once	Number	18	9	27	
	Percent	15.3	11.1	13.6	
Twice	Number	11	5	16	
	Percent	9.3	6.2	8.0	
Three times	Number	7	4	11	
	Percent	5.9	4.9	5.5	
Four times or more	Number	8	16	24	
	Percent	6.8	19.8	12.1	
Total	Number	118	81	199	
	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	

However, there was a significant relationship between gender and frequency of engagement in cyber bullying (“How often have you engaged in cyber bullying?”; $X^2=6.042$, $p=0.049$; Table 7). Whereas 78.8% of female students never engaged in cyber bullying, 13.6% engaged in cyber bullying once, and 7.6% engaged in cyber bullying twice or more, 64.2% of male students never engaged in cyber bullying, 18.5% engaged in cyber bullying once, and 17.3% engaged in cyber bullying twice or more. Therefore, males engaged in cyber bullying more frequently than females.

Table 7. Gender differences in frequency of cyber bullying

Frequency of cyber bullying	Gender			X ² /p	
	Female	Male	Total		
Never	Number	93	52	145	$X^2=6.042$ $p=0.049$
	Percent	78.8	64.2	72.9	
Once	Number	16	15	31	
	Percent	13.6	18.5	15.6	
Twice or more	Number	9	14	23	
	Percent	7.6	17.3	11.6	
Total	Number	118	81	199	
	Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

One of the main findings of this study was that a large proportion of students had been exposed to cyber bullying and e-mail, SMS and phone calls were the leading ways in which cyber bullying occurred. Studies exist in the literature that supports this phenomenon. In [17] study 10% of the participants who are 17-25 age group appeared to be the victims of cyber-bullying. In [20] study conducted at Texas University 32.4% of the participants expressed that they have been cyber-bullied at least from SMS, e-mail and social network. In [13] study which was conducted with university students, 57% of them were cyber-bullied less than 4 times, 29% 4-5 times, 14% more than 10 times. In [31] study with female university students who were cyber bullied, they mostly experienced the seizing of someone else's account (hack), receive unwanted sexual messages, sort of harassment in the form of text messages and insulting comments.

Most students who had been exposed to cyber bullying told their peers or parents about the incident. However, studies of elementary and high school students put together demonstrate that most victims do not talk about the incident with anyone and that they are more likely to tell friends than parents or other adults. Talking to teachers about cyber bullying rarely or never occurs ([35]; [36]; [10]; [37]; [3]; [38]). In the present study, the tendency of students to talk about their exposure to cyber bullying primarily with friends may be a result of being away from families and spending most of their time with friends. Based on findings from [34] study, in a higher education setting, as many students as are above 18 and considered adults view the role of parents as perhaps diminished, and parents may not be a helpful support system for students who have been cyber bullied. Very low rates of talking to prosecution officers or teachers may arise from not considering these individuals as providing solutions to this problem. Knowing that there are no legal sanctions or penalties for cyber bullying may also have influenced this result. According to personal communication with an attorney, there are no laws that directly regulate cyber bullying in Turkey. Procedures applied in response to crimes committed on the internet, including cyber bullying, are regulated within the scope of law number 5651 on Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publications, which imposes obligations on parties (i.e., hosting service providers) running the virtual environments in which such crimes were committed. Therefore, sanctions imposed on perpetrators should be researched within the framework of relevant laws [39].

According to the findings, most victims did not know the cyber-bully. Cyber victims generally do not know their cyber bullies who harass them. A cyber bully can be a next door neighbor or a close friend, and this secrecy allows cyber bullies to behave in a manner in which they could never have in real life ([9]; [10]). There have been other studies in the literature in support of this finding. For example, according to [40] cyber bullies send rude messages, photos and videos to their victims and the victims are not aware of the identities of the senders. According to the study [13] conducted at the Midwestern University, 54% of the students have friends who have been cyber-bullied and have received unwanted messages through computer and other electronic devices from people they do not know. There are several potential reasons why young people may behave in such a manner. For example, cyber-bullies can easily hide their identities, they do not have to take responsibility for their actions because there is no face-to-face communication with their victims, cyber bullying allows them a way to establish control over others and they may take pleasure in engaging in assaultive behaviors in a virtual environment [41].

In a previous study, [42] it has been found that teenagers who had experienced cyber bullying avoided chatting with strangers and stayed away from chat rooms. In addition, [36] it was found that teenagers used several different strategies to prevent cyber bullying, including changing private passwords and issuing warnings to the bullies. In this study, a significant percentage of the students did not recognize the cyber-bullying against them. This could have arisen from the fact that students did not know the behavior against them was cyber-bullying and a crime. However, some of the students mentioned that they responded to the cyber-bullying against them, but at a low rate. This behavior could be an indicator of the fact that students did not know cyber-bullying was a legal crime or they were not aware of its negative and destructive impacts.

In this study, most of the students had never engaged in cyber bullying. In [20] study at Texas University only 16% of the students expressed that they did cyber bullying to others. A similar finding was obtained in [17] study which was conducted on 17-25 age group. According to

the findings only 11% of the students were cyber-bullies. The high level of education could be the factor for such findings.

According to the findings; social networking sites, SMS and chat rooms were the leading ways in which engagement in cyber bullying occurred. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which report that methods used for cyber bullying include instant messages, e-mail, phone calls, SMS, sending pictures or videos, chatting in chat rooms, websites, and social networks ([43], [44], [45], [46]). The frequent use of information technology, particularly by young people, is a key factor contributing to this finding. Considering that the young generations are surrounded by information technology from birth, the answers to these questions may not be surprising.

Although most students who had been exposed to cyber bullying shared their experiences with friends, the majority of cyber bullies did not talk about their harmful behavior with others. Cyber bullies generally harass their victims without revealing their identity or talking about their harmful behavior with other people.

According to the findings, males and females do not differ in frequency of being a cyber victim. This finding is in agreement with that by [47], who report that female and male high school students show no difference in cyber victim scores.

The main findings of this study were that female pre-service teachers had experienced more cyber bullying-related obstruction and harm than males, and male pre-service teachers had engaged in more sexual cyber bullying than females. In addition and in general, more males had engaged in cyber bullying than females.

Several studies demonstrate that regardless of age group, males engage in cyber bullying more frequently than females ([44, 48-55]). Females, however, may be greater victims of cyber bullying because they typically spend more time in chat rooms, on message boards, or sending instant messages, with nearly three-fourths of 12- to 18-year-old girls spending more time online than doing homework [56]. Although some studies, such as those by [57-58] and [59], report that gender is not related to likelihood of being a cyber bully/victim, other studies report that males have a greater likelihood of being a cyber bully/victim compared to females. For instance, [35] and [60] found that male high school students are exposed to and engage in cyber bullying more often than female students. The present study also shows that male students engage in cyber bullying more than female students. This finding may be due to male children being given a pass and freer to do what they please as a result of traditional raising attitudes of Turkish families, who may permit male children to use information technology, such as computers and mobile phones, and enter internet cafes more frequently than female children. Considering relevant studies across several cultures, the tendency of males to engage in higher rates of cyber bullying may be indicative of their attempts to maintain physical superiority in virtual environments.

Pre-service teachers enrolled in university have been both cyber bullies and victims of cyber bullying, similar to younger and more vulnerable elementary, middle, and high school students. For this reason, teacher-students should be educated about cyber bullying, legal sanctions, and protection methods via revisions in curriculum and new courses on the topic. Moreover, seminars with police officers and lawyers should be held for teacher-students as well as teachers, administrators, and parents. Because the current Turkish sanctions are not a disincentive for cyber bullies, it is necessary for lawmakers to enact more effective punishments and sanctions for this harmful behavior.

Cyber bullying is a serious danger for young people living in the internet age. Considering the millions of internet users, individuals can potentially be cyber bullies or victims regardless of age, gender, profession, or level of education. There are a few number of studies on cyber bullying among preservice teachers in the literature. Therefore, this study has potential to provide detailed information about that topic for the prospective readers. In the light of its findings, the following suggestions can be offered to researchers and practitioners:

1. Future research can consider educational and socio-economic status of the family as well as details of the social environment in which students reside.
2. Future research can examine the effects of being a cyber bully or victim on students' immediate surroundings.
3. Future research can examine the relationship between cyber bullying and physical bullying.

4. Research findings can be disseminated to university students, who will ultimately become parents.
5. Similar cyber bullying questionnaires can be distributed to raise awareness among elementary, middle, and high school students.
6. Cyber bullying education can be provided to children, adolescents, and young adults.
7. Young people can be taught methods of protecting themselves against cyber bullying.
8. Cyber bullying education can be provided to parents, teachers, and administrators.
9. Laws directly addressing cyber bullying should be passed, and necessary regulations and sanctions should be enacted.

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