

How do School Children Learn Cyberbullying Perpetration?

Okul Çağındaki Çocuklar Siber Zorbalık Yapmayı Nasıl Öğreniyorlar?

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ABSTRACT: With the advancements of the information and communication technologies, school children have started to use the information and communication technologies for cyberbullying purposes. Research has suggested some implications for how young people may learn cyberbullying perpetration. However, no research appears to have investigated how school children learn how to cyberbully others online. To fill this gap, this current review study investigated the relevant research regarding the possible resources of cyberbullying perpetration among school children. A total of 14 research studies published between 2006 and 2016 were reviewed based on several selection criteria. This review was based on Social-Ecological Framework and Affordances Theory as theoretical backgrounds. The findings of the review showed that relations at home and relations at school and affordances of information and communication technologies were the three main resources that school children learn cyberbullying perpetration. Therefore, researchers, psychological counselors and other mental health professionals aiming to prevent and intervene in cyberbullying, should have an inclusive approach by considering the relations at home, the relations at school and the affordances of information and communication technologies.

Keywords: cyberbullying perpetration, learning, school children.

ÖZ: Bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki ilerlemelerle birlikte okul çağındaki çocuklar bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerini siber zorbalık yapma amacıyla da kullanmaya başladılar. Araştırmalar okul çağındaki çocukların bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerini siber zorbalık yapma amacıyla kullanmayı nasıl öğrendiklerine dair bulgular raporlamaktadırlar. Fakat, okul çağındaki çocukların siber zorbalık yapmayı nasıl öğrendiklerine dair herhangi bir araştırma mevcut değildir. Bu boşluğu doldurmak amacıyla bu derleme çalışması, okul çağındaki çocukların siber zorbalığı öğrenme kaynaklarını incelemektedir. Bu çalışmada, birçok kritere dayalı olarak seçilen ve 2006 ve 2016 yılları arasında yayımlanmış toplam 14 çalışma taranmıştır. Bu derleme çalışmasının kuramsal altyapısını Sosyal-Ekolojik Kuram ve İmkan Sağlayıcılık Kuramı (Affordances Theory) oluşturmaktadır. Yapılan derlemenin bulguları, evdeki ilişkilerin, okuldaki ilişkilerin ve bilgi iletişim teknolojilerinin sağladığı imkânların okul çağındaki çocukların siber zorbalık yapmayı öğrendikleri üç temel kaynak olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla, okul çağındaki çocuklar için siber zorbalığı önlemeye ve müdahale etmeye yönelik programlar geliştirip uygulamak isteyen araştırmacıların, psikolojik danışmanların ve diğer akıl sağlığı uzmanlarının, evi ve okulu kapsayan sosyal-ekolojik çevreyi ve bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin sağladıkları imkanları göz önünde bulundurmalarında fayda vardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: siber zorbalık yapma, öğrenme, okul çağındaki çocuklar.

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Introduction

Cyber bullying is “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278). As a growing concern among young people, cyberbullying has attracted the attention of the researchers interested in preventing violence at schools. Before the advancement and the common usage of information and communication technologies (ICTs), students were only able to get involved in bullying events in the school yard. In the traditional form of bullying, the incident used to happen in a certain school environment. ICTs however, have started to offer new and additional bullying possibilities. For example, any bullying incident between two school children can be recorded as a photo or video, and this record can be shared online to infinite number audiences. Thus, cyberbullying has changed the characteristics of traditional bullying occurring at schools, which has raised several disputes about the extent, nature and impacts of cyberbullying.

Although the definitional criteria of the cyberbullying behaviors have still been under debate (e.g., Olweus & Limber, 2017), there are a number of suggested criteria by Menesini et al., 2012. As the first criterion, intentionality is the intention of the bully to harm others. Repetition is the second feature of a cyberbullying incident which means a behavior needs to be repeated to be considered as cyberbullying. Yet, a cyberbullying perpetrator does not need to perform the act again and again because the online nature of the cyberbullying actions seems allowing people to view and share the bullying content in a never-ending fashion. Thirdly, there should be a power imbalance between cyberbullies and their targets. But, the imbalance of power can be contextualized differently considering the nature of the cyberbullying behaviors. While traditional bullies aiming to perpetrate others need to be physically more powerful than the victims, cyberbullies do not necessarily need physical power. As long as people know how to use ICTs, they are able to bully others online. The further characteristic of cyberbullying is anonymity which refers to the fact that cyberbullies can hide behind fake screen names or can act anonymously in the cyber environment. Publicity is the last feature of a cyberbullying conduct. Publicity of an online content has the potential to intensify the negative impacts of the cyberbullying compared to the traditional bullying which is restricted to a school environment.

The existing research conducted in different countries is in agreement that cyberbullying has become a worldwide concern for the youth (e.g., Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015a; Herrera-Lopez, Casas, Romera, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2017). Young people from all ages ranging from primary school to high school have been reported to engage in cyberbullying incidents (e.g., Arslan, Savaser, Hallett, & Balci, 2012; Safaria, 2016). As a problem of international nature, researching and understanding more about cyberbullying is of high importance. The negative impacts of being cyberbullied have also been the concern of the researchers. Harmful consequences of cyber victimization can be grouped into four categories; affective, social, physical and school-related. Anxiety, depressive symptoms, angeriness, sadness, guilt, shame and frustration were reported among the affective impacts (Chin, 2011; Erdur-Baker & Tanrikulu, 2010; Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011). Social consequences of cyber victimization involve withdrawal from

friends, loneliness and peer rejection (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kroon, 2011; Ybarra, 2004). Self-harm and hostile school environments are examples of the physical impacts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Shariff, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In terms of problems at school, school children may have problems of attendance and grade at school as a consequence of being a cyber victim (Johnson, 2011). Cyberbullying can be concluded to have become a global concern negatively affecting young people. Thus, understanding more about cyberbullying is significant to help the youth. In this respect, examining how school children learn cyberbullying perpetration can add valuable information for the prevention and intervention strategies for cyberbullying.

Problem Statement

Young people seem to have embraced information and communication technologies (ICTs) for cyberbullying purposes (Tanrikulu, Akbaba-Altun, Erdur-Baker, & Yerin-Güneri, 2015). The question is how young people learn to use ICTs to bully others online. The existing literature suggests some implications for how school children may learn cyberbullying perpetration. Yet, as far as the author of this research knows, no research has investigated the resources of cyberbullying perpetration yet. This present review thus, aimed to fill this gap by integrating the relevant research regarding the possible resources of cyberbullying perpetration.

Significance of the Review

This review aimed to investigate the learning resources of cyberbullying perpetration with its focus on social relationships and the nature of the ICTs. Studies have discussed about how to prevent cyberbullying among school children (e.g., Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013). Yet, a discussion about how school children learn bullying others online does exist yet. Discovering more about resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration has the potential to contribute to the prevention research on cyberbullying. With its specific focus on learning, this research will contribute to the extant cyberbullying literature by investigating social relationships and the nature of the ICTs as two possible resources for learning cyberbullying perpetration. Moreover, this review can also help the existing research of cyberbullying prevention to improve and update the existing preventive measures of cyberbullying.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Framework (Hong & Espelage, 2012) and Affordances Theory (Day & Lloyd, 2007; Wijekumar, Meyer, Wagoner, & Ferguson, 2006) make up the theoretical framework of this review study. According to Social-Ecological Framework, bullying involvement is conceptualized as social relationships. Therefore, Social-Ecological Framework suggests that studying social relationships is important since bullying cannot be isolated from the existing social environments. In this respect, home and school will be considered in this study as two social settings where school children can learn cyber bullying others as a result of social relationships. Affordances Theory can be helpful to theoretically conceptualize how school children learn to cyberbully others. ICTs provide certain possibilities for the users, and the users engage in mutual interactions with the digital tools. In other words, while users are directed, leaded or restricted by the ICTs, they choose what to do with the ICTs.

Wijekumar et al., (2006) state that previous experiences with similar ICTs, domain knowledge, a certain age are required to recognize the affordance of ICTs. As former experiences, domain knowledge, and the age of the ICT users will differ for every person, ICTs can be assumed to provide different affordances for different users. While some users can benefit from ICTs for entertainment or searching for information, others may prefer using the same ICTs for bullying purposes. Moreover, affordances of the ICTs have been suggested providing significant learning opportunities (Day & Lloyd, 2007). One of the goals of this review is therefore, to examine how ICTs can afford learning cyberbullying perpetration among school children.

Method

Of the six categories of research synthesis methods that Suri and Clarke (2009) elaborated on, this study can be methodologically categorized as a “qualitative syntheses of qualitative and quantitative research”. In this respect, both qualitative and quantitative empirical research will be included in this study since synthesizing the empirical evidence of the two research methods can potentially contribute to the present literature regarding cyberbullying perpetration.

Data Resource

EBSCOHOST was the main database as the resource of data. Concurrently, Google Scholar was searched to reach studies published by journals which are not covered by *EBSCOHOST*. The main search term was *cyberbullying perpetration plus (+) bully and bully-victim*. To identify the studies specific to each cyberbullying perpetration learning resources, additional terms were inserted with the main search term above: *parenting style, workplace cyberbullying, primary school, middle school, high school, ICTs, affordances, violence, online games*.

Selection Criteria

Several criteria were applied to select articles for this study. First, since research reporting empirical evidence regarding cyberbullying mainly started in 2006, studies published between 2006 and 2016 (a 10-year period) were searched to determine articles for reviewing. Second, articles for this review research had to be either qualitative or quantitative and needed to report empirical data. Third, an article to be selected had to be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. In addition, among the searched articles, the ones specifically examined and provided data for perpetrators, bullies or bully-victims of cyberbullying were only picked up for this review study; studies concerning victims of cyberbullying were disregarded. Next, participants of a research to be selected for the review needed to be primary/ elementary school, middle school or high school students; research presenting results for cyberbullying perpetration among university students was ignored. This is because maturity of the personality characteristics, character development, ICTs usage skills and habits, relationships with parents and siblings, and school atmosphere of the university students can be surmised to be different. It is important to note that the last two criteria listed above could not be applied while searching for studies regarding cyberbullying at work and affordances of ICTs. As a result, a total of 14 research articles were reviewed in this current study.

Results

Home-related Resources

Parents and siblings can be the home-related resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration for the school children. In addition to the young people, parents can also be involved in cyberbullying experiences in their daily lives. Parents can get engaged in cyberbullying with friends, relatives, colleagues or unknown people. To date, any research examining parents' involvement of cyberbullying cannot be found. However, Privitera and Campbell (2009) investigated how adults were cyberbullied in the workplace. Accordingly, almost 11% of the adults reported to have been cyberbullied by the colleagues, and hiding information, spreading gossip and accusations were the most common cyberbullying behaviors conducted in workplace. Considering this, parents who are involved in a cyberbullying incident either as a victim or a bully can be anticipated as a possible resource for learning cyberbullying perpetration. Parents' discussing about their experiences of cyberbullying at home may cause the young people develop an awareness about cyberbullying. By listening to parents, young people may learn about strategies and impacts of cyberbullying. Parents seem to have an additional role of encouraging young people to learn and participate in cyberbullying. According to a recent study by Hinduja and Patchin (2013), school children ranging in grade from six to twelve reported that the more cyberbullying incidents were taken seriously or punished by parents, the less they would like to get involved in cyberbullying. Thus, parents seem to have a substantial role in cyberbullying involvement.

Siblings may be another home-related resource to learn how to cyberbully others. Kowalski and Limber (2007) asked 3767 school children from grades 6, 7, and 8 about the identity of the cyberbullying perpetrator. Almost 30% of the victims and bully-victims of cyberbullying reported that the perpetrator was their sibling. ICTs may be a preferable method for bullying a sister or a brother for some reasons. In addition, Tanrikulu & Campbell, (2015b) found that almost 10% of the school children in grades 5 to 12 cyber bullied their siblings. These imply that technology provides opportunities of cyberbullying perpetration to the siblings. First, technology can provide anonymity to the sibling bullies. By hiding behind the technology, bullies can anonymously harm siblings and neutralize the effect of their victims' strategies of coping with bullying in traditional ways. Anonymity may also allow sibling bullies to escape attention and punishment from their parents for bullying at home. Furthermore, technology may enable a power imbalance between sibling bullies and their victims. The victimized siblings may lack physical power against their bullying sister(s) or brother(s); yet, they may achieve a digital type of power by using technology. Also, sibling bullies may prefer technology to increase the impact of the humiliation by reaching a larger audience who are not limited to the home. Lastly, acquiring or producing digital materials for bullying purposes seems easier for siblings who share and spend most of their time together. Sibling bullies can easily obtain and share embarrassing voice or video records, or shameful photos or even distorted photoshopped images of their sisters or brothers. In addition to siblings' cyberbullying each other, one of the siblings may be involved in cyberbullying either as a perpetrator or a victim. Such an involvement can lead the other sibling to become aware about cyberbullying and act as a cyberbullying

perpetrator. Hence, having a sister or brother who gets engaged in cyberbullying perpetration can be assumed to be an important resource to learn how to cyberbully others.

School-related Resources

Peers and adults at school can be the school-related resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration. Schools are one of the main places where school children socialize. During the socialization process, children get engaged in several relationships with peers. While some relationships can positively lead school children, other relationships can do the opposite. Cyberbullying can be regarded as relationship which leads and impacts school children in a negative way. In spite of the fact that cyberbullying behaviors can occur outside the school as well, learning how to cyberbully others cannot be isolated from the social environment of the peers at school. Research has revealed that school children in all grades cyberbully others. Almost 35% of the primary school students from grade two to four reported having had a cyberbully or a cyberbully-victim role in a cyberbullying incident (Arslan, et al., 2012). Moreover, 10% of the middle school students were found to have been involved as a cyber bully (Popovic-Citic, Djuric, & Cvetkovic, 2011). As for the high school students, approximately 35% had cyberbullied others (Zhou et al., 2013). These results imply that young people are commonly using ICTs to bully others online. Considering this implication, a young person who may not use ICTs for harmful reasons can observe and learn cyberbullying from peers. Either students' peers in the same class or in other classes may be the cyberbullies, or students can be targeted as a victim of cyberbullying. In such a situation at school, it seems almost unavoidable for a young person to learn how to cyberbully others. Therefore, peers appear to be one of the principal resources of learning cyberbullying others.

The indifference of adults at school like counselors, teachers or principals can be another reason for cyberbullying perpetration. What makes cyberbullying perpetration distinctive from the traditional bullying perpetration may be the difficulty of spotting it in the school setting. Bullying others online instead of offline would be more desirable for students since they can act aggressively without being realized by any adults at school. For this reason, it would be preferable for a perpetrator to learn the methods of cyberbullying to avoid adult surveillance at school. For this reason, an awareness of cyberbullying behaviors occurring at school is needed by the adults for taking a preventive role against cyberbullying. Young people however, reported that adults were not aware about cyberbullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Interestingly however, students stated that if adults at school were informed about cyberbullying perpetration, they would help to stop cyberbullying (Li, 2007) and thus, students would not engage in cyberbullying incidents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Being unaware of cyberbullying, adults at schools can be an encouraging resource of learning cyberbullying for the perpetrators.

Technology-related Resources

The affordances that ICTs provides can be the technology-related resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration. ICTs provide several affordances for the users, and the users engage in mutual interactions with ICTs. In this joint relationship, while ICTs limit or allow certain actions, it is up to the users how to utilize ICTs. The previous

studies basically linked the affordances of the ICTs to improve the classroom learning practices (e.g., Day & Lloyd, 2007; Wijekumar et al., 2006). With their potentials to contribute to the learning at school, affordances of ICTs however, can act as possible resources of learning how to cyberbully others. The associations between affordances of ICTs and learning cyberbullying perpetration have not been investigated by the existing literature yet. Therefore, implications will be drawn from the parallel research related to affordances of ICTs.

To be able to discuss the links between affordances of ICTs and learning cyberbullying perpetration, types of affordances provided by ICTs should be made clear first. Some of the definitional characteristics of cyberbullying investigated by recent studies (Menesini et al., 2012; Slonje, et al., 2013) appear to be among the affordances of ICTs that cyberbullies can misuse. Anonymity as one of the main affordances ICTs provide can attract bullies to move physical bullying perpetration into cyber space. It is almost impossible to escape from the witnessing eyes in cases of bullying others in physical environments. But, online environments mostly do not necessitate disclosing a bully's identity, which makes it easier to bully others online without being noticed. Learning about this fact, bullies can feel relaxed and confident in cyberbullying others since ICTs provide them a sense of anonymity. Anonymity thus, can be considered as a significant resource regarding learning cyberbullying perpetration. Repetitive nature of the shared content on cyber environments can be an additional affordance of ICTs. Learning about this affordance, a young person with bullying intentions would prefer to perpetrate bullying by ICTs. In physical space, bullying is limited to the school; yet, sharing an offending bullying content will allow to repeat the bullying perpetration without spending any effort. Furthermore, ICTs increase the publicity of a bullying incident. While bullying in physical space is limited to a certain number people, cyberbullying does not have any limits. Any person in the world has chances to witness the bullying incident happening online. Learning about this affordance of the ICTs, bullies would favor cyber environments instead of physical space.

In addition, the contemporary ICTs offer further affordances which make learning and engaging cyberbullying more favorable. Smart phones or tablets for example, can be used to create photos, audio-records and videos simultaneously. These affordances permit the cyberbullies to produce and share several types of materials to hurt the victims. Moreover, the contemporary ICTs also allow the digital content to be manipulated in the desired way. For instance, a cyberbully can photo-shop a photo in an embarrassing way; turn the photo into a shameful video and add a humiliating sound to the video. Furthermore, the contemporary ICTs have started to provide features which make learning and engaging cyberbullying more encouraging. For example, some applications which are basically for online socialization have started to offer features to enhance their anonymity affordance. By using such ICTs, young people can anonymously ask embarrassing questions to each other or they can share humiliating content which is assumed to disappear in seconds. To sum up, the affordances of the contemporary ICTs which make cyberbullying easier and more favorable can be an important learning resource for the young people to engage in cyberbullying perpetration.

Learning about the affordances of ICTs can also generate an unusual path for the cyberbullies to perform violence they have been exposed to. Up-to-date research has

revealed interesting associations between cyberbullying perpetration and video games with violent content. A study conducted with children aging from 10 to 17 found that playing violent videogames was significantly linked to cyberbullying others online (Dittrick, Beran, Mishna, Hetherington, & Shariff, 2013). Another study whose sample was made up of 13-18 years old high school students also revealed significant relationships between exposure to violent online games and being a cyberbully or a cyberbully-victim (Lam, Cheng, & Liu, 2013). These findings suggest some notable implications for learning how to cyberbully. First, young people seem to prefer affordances of ICTs to carry out the violence they are subjected to in violent games. Besides, these findings also suggest that for the young people who are exposed to violence in other places like home or school, ICTs can be favorable tools of cyberbullying. In short, learning about the affordances of ICTs appears to create new pathways for the young people who want to perform violence.

Discussion and Conclusions

The extant cyberbullying literature has explored the nature and the extent of cyberbullying perpetration among school children (e.g., Popovic et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2013). However, the question of how school children learn bullying others in cyber space has not been examined yet. Such an examination can be helpful to understand cyberbullying perpetration and develop preventive measures against cyberbullying. This review research examined the potential resources that perpetrators learn how to cyberbully others. Theoretically based on *Social-Ecological Framework* and *Affordances Theory*, the research reviewed by this study indicates that cyberbullying perpetration should be considered in a social-ecological approach with keeping the affordances of ICTs in mind. More specifically, resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration regarding home, school and affordances of ICTs were reviewed.

Considering the research reviewed by this study, social relationships seem to be potential resources which help learn cyberbullying perpetration. A young person's social life is generally formed by the relationships at home and school. Parents or siblings who are engaged in a cyberbullying incident can lead a young person to become aware about cyberbullying and act as a cyberbullying perpetrator. Research suggests that parents and siblings can be the possible resources that young people can learn cyberbullying perpetration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Privitera & Campbell, 2009). However, as investigations are limited for cyberbullying perpetration of the parents and siblings, future research is required to examine the impact of relations at home on cyberbullying perpetration.

Peers and adults at school can also be considered as possible resources of cyberbullying perpetration. Regarding the ample research about cyber perpetration among peers, peers can be concluded as one of the main resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Arslan, et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2013). The interesting finding of this review was about the impact of adults on learning cyberbullying perpetration. Young children reported that if the adults at school were more aware and serious about what is happening in cyber space, they would not be willing to get engaged in cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Similar opinions were reported about the parents as well (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). These findings imply that future

cyberbullying prevention studies need to involve adults at home and school, if they want to curb cyberbullying among young people.

Considering the investigations reviewed by this research, affordances of ICTs as potential resources for learning cyberbullying perpetration seem to be an ignored issue. Although affordances of ICTs which can support learning has been examined (Day & Lloyd, 2007; Wijekumar et al., 2006), no research has studied how affordances of ICTs contribute to learning cyberbullying perpetration. This review discussed that anonymity, repetitive nature of the shared content on cyber environments, extended publicity of an incident, creating and manipulating content, and fostering a limitless anonymity could create several possibilities to get encouraged and learn how to bully other with the help of ICTs. Additionally, research indicated that cyberbullying perpetration has been used to reveal observed violence with a positive relationship between cyberbullying perpetration and playing violent video games (Dittrick et al., 2013; Lam et al., 2013). It can be concluded that preventing cyberbullying perpetration does not seem to be easy because of the various affordances provided by ICTs. In fact, considering that contemporary ICTs' aim to increase the affordances they currently have, cyberbullying perpetration may become more difficult to fight against in the future. Thus, isolating cyberbullying perpetration from the affordances provided by ICTs can result in misleading findings for the prevention research. For this reason, researchers need to consider the affordances of ICTs in future research.

Limitations and Strengths

How young people can learn cyberbullying perpetration has not been a topic investigated yet. First of all, a limited amount of existing research was only reviewed. Additionally, this research did not have any purpose to reveal any generalizable data; the reviewed studies were mainly discussed by considering about learning cyberbullying perpetration. On the other hand, by shedding light on theories of social-ecological framework and affordances theory, this review study is distinct with its focus on how cyberbullying perpetration can be learnt by school children.

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