

A review on emotions associated with cyberbullying in young adults

Una revisión sobre emociones asociadas al ciberacoso en jóvenes adultos

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Background

Cyberbullying is a repeat and intentional form of aggression mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Cyberbullying usually takes the form of taunts, threats, insults, humiliations, extortion and harassment. There are three types of roles in cyberbullying: aggressors, victims and bystanders. Most cyberbullying studies have focused on adolescents (12-17 years). That is why reviews of young adults are scarce. In the search of background, we found only one adult-centered review article. Cyberbullying in young adults is relevant as a research phenomenon mainly because it concerns authorities, teachers and university students. We could better understand human actions if we include emotions, that are behavioral predispositions with physiological, experiential and cognitive components. In this context, our research question is what relationships exist between emotions and cyberbullying in young adults.

Aims

We aim to describe and analyze relationships between emotions and cyberbullying in young adults reported in scientific research papers published between 2017 and 2019.

Method & Procedures

We conduct a scoping review that involves making visible how a field of study is delimited. The first inclusion criterion was to focus on empirical papers published in scientific journals between 2017 and 2019. The second criterion was that the papers were written in Spanish or English and published in indexed journals in global or regional databases: Scopus, PsyArticles, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis, Springer, Wiley Online Library, SciELO and Redalyc. The third criterion was that papers refer to cyberbullying and emotions in their title, summary or keywords. The fourth criterion was that research samples consisted mainly of young adults in the roles of victims, aggressors or bystanders. We recovered a total of 32 papers. We analyzed the papers from the following aspects: 1) the country in which the study was conducted, 2) sample characteristics, 3) instruments used and 4) emotions identified in victims, aggressors and spectators.

Results & discussion

We analyzed 32 papers. As for the number of participants, the minimum was 25 and the maximum 4,626. A total of 14,074 young people participated. In terms of gender, the percentage of women in research is between 39% and 100%. Most studies have a quantitative methodological design, are descriptive and correlational. The instruments used to generate quantitative data were scales (51), questionnaires (38), inventories (6), focus groups (2), open or closed questions (7) and interviews (2).

Cyberbullying produces fear, worry, frustration, irritability, sadness, anger, disappointment, hopelessness and shame in victims. Anxiety and anger are the most common emotions between aggressors. Regarding bystanders, it is common for them to feel fear, sadness, pity, empathy and anger. These emotions intensify when they meet victims and aggressors, which is relatively common on social media.

The predominant use of quantitative methodologies explains the limitations of the research analyzed to advance understandings of the behaviors of victims, spectators and aggressors. According to the study carried out, no papers analyses the trajectories of people nor their motivations to participate in situations of cyberbullying.

Conclusion

Beyond adolescents associated with cyberbullying, this problem concerns to young adults. They are in the transitional period of the first years of adult life and is during this period that become most vulnerable, which encompasses middle and higher education, as well as early romantic-sex relationships and first work experiences.

Keywords: cyberbullying, emotions, youth adults, scoping review

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