Orginal Article

The Relationship between Psychological Factors and Cyberbullying in Students: The Mediating Role of Problematic Internet Use

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Introduction

Despite its many benefits, the Internet can be a great way to express risky online behaviors during adolescence. Committing cyberbullying and problematic use of the Internet are among the potentially high-risk behaviors on the Internet. Problem behaviors in adolescence originate from permanent characteristics rather than from immediate, instantaneous characteristics. To understand these behaviors, it is necessary to focus on personality-related factors in addition to the perceived environment and behavioral systems. Considering the undeniable tendency of adolescents to excessive Internet use and the negative consequences resulting from this choice and the lack of empirical investigation of this issue in Iranian research, despite the importance of the relationship between problematic Internet use and psychological variables and cyberbullying, as well as contradictory findings on the significance of the relationship between some of these variables with the problematic Internet use and committing cyberbullying in past foreign studies, the present study aims to develop a structural model of the relationship between committing cyberbullying and psychological factors including social connectedness, self-esteem and depression among adolescent boy students through the problematic Internet use and to test the explanatory power of different models from the combination of some theoretical orientations through an assumed model, in order to provide more explanations about the relationships of the variables that were indicated in the past researches. Thus, the aim of this study was

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to investigate the mediating role of problematic Internet use in the relationship between cyberbullying and psychological factors.

Method

The method of the present study was descriptive-correlational. The study population consisted of all boys' high school students in Tehran in the academic year 1400-1401. The basis for choosing the sample size was the logic proposed by Kline (2010), that according to the free parameters of the assumed model and the possibility of dropping out of the participants, 325 people was selected as the research sample using the convenience method. To collect data, we used the Cyberbullying/ Victimization Experiences Questionnaire (Antoniadou, Kokkinos & Markos, 2016), Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (Jelenchick, Eickhoff, Christakis, Brown, Zhang, Benson et al., 2014), Short Depression-Happiness Scale (Joseph, Linley, Harwood, Lewis & McCollam, 2004), Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) & Revised Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1998). The psychometric properties of all instruments were examined and confirmed. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

The inferential results showed that there is a positive, significant and direct relationship between depression and problematic Internet use and cyberbullying; negative & insignificant relationship between self-esteem with problematic Internet use, & negative, significant & direct relationship between self-esteem with cyberbullying; negative, significant and direct relationship between social connectedness with problematic Internet use and cyberbullying, & there is a positive and significant relationship between problematic Internet use with cyberbullying. Indirect effects of depression and social connectedness on cyberbullying through the problematic Internet use was statistically significant, and indirect effect of self-esteem was statistically insignificant. Accordingly, the indirect relationship between depression and social connectedness with cyberbullying through problematic Internet use was statistically significant, and the indirect relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying through problematic Internet use was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The findings of the present study proposed relationships in understanding problematic and risky online behaviors among adolescents and highlighted the important influence of psychological characteristics on problematic online behaviors and cyberbullying among students, as well as supporting evidence for the problematic behavior theory in explaining

risky online behaviors, and provided offline students. The results of the present study can be used in preventive interventions for students' participation in cyberbullying, academic counseling centers or school counseling to guide parents, teachers and students to raise awareness about psychological well-being through the use of the Internet.

Keywords: cyberbullying, problematic Internet use, depression, self-esteem, social connectedness