Chapter 2

Unravelling Adolescent Perceptions:
Profiles of Victims and Offenders in Cyber Interpersonal Abuse

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ABSTRACT

Cyber interpersonal abuse refers to the detrimental and harmful behaviours that occur within digital communication platforms, encompassing a wide range of negative interactions such as cyber dating abuse, cyberbullying, online harassment, stalking, and various other forms of online aggression. This chapter investigates the nuanced perspectives of adolescents concerning cyber interpersonal abuse, with a particular focus on the profiling of both victims and offenders. Fifteen focus groups were held to collect data, with 108 adolescents, 42 boys and 66 girls, aged between 11 and 15 years (M= 12.87; SD=0.31). The findings unveil adolescents' perceptions of cyber interpersonal abuse, depicting a female victim and a male aggressor profile. The results underscore a nuanced understanding of the dynamics, emphasizing gender complexities. This chapter aims to enhance comprehension of the intricacies of interpersonal cyber interpersonal abuse among adolescents. Additionally, it discusses preventive strategies and outlines future research challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread dissemination of mobile technology and the ubiquitous accessibility of the internet have significantly contributed to the exponential growth of online connectivity and communication, surpassing any previous era in human history (Aslan & Karakus Yilmaz, 2021). Vogels et al. (2022) confirmed that 35% of teens use at least one of the top five online platforms "almost constantly." When faced with the prospect of giving up social media, 54% of teenagers express difficulty in doing so, particularly girls (58%). According to the same study, most adolescents own digital devices, including smartphones (95%), desktop or laptop computers (90%), and gaming consoles (80%). Meanwhile, teens' internet use stands at 97%.

Currently, "digital skills" are widely recognized as technical and operational communication capabilities influenced by individual, social, and national factors, and are unevenly distributed. Given their potential for professional advancement, personal development, and civic participation, digital skills are essential. The absence of digital literacy or the inability to enhance one's digital literacy significantly limits opportunities for career advancement, personal development, and social engagement. Despite their importance, there is still much to be understood about how these skills develop and how best to support them. Furthermore, little is known about the potential benefits of digital skills for the well-being, social engagement, or resilience of children and teenagers in virtual environments. Currently, formal education plays a crucial role in determining the quality of digital education provided, largely influenced by individual instructors and schools. However, to better support digital skills in formal education, increased collaboration and coordinated efforts with stakeholders outside of the education sector are needed. Establishing a standardized definition of digital skills, appropriate conceptual frameworks, and reliable metrics for assessing them is essential. Only with this shared understanding can evidence-based interventions be developed and policies effectively guided. In 2022, the second Youth Skills (ySkills) longitudinal study, a project on digital skills in adolescence, was conducted. This project investigates how digital skills mitigate the potential hazards of ICT use among European youth, specifically those between 12 and 17. Portugal was one of the six European countries where the study took place. Portuguese teens recognize the importance of working with office tools, such as sending an email. This conclusion reinforces the project's main goal and reflects the benefits of digital abilities in teens' lives (Donoso, 2022). In Portugal, 956 students from eight different schools participated in the surveys. The results show that, on average, Portuguese teenagers believe they excel in 70% of digital activities related to communication and interaction. These activities include using appropriate means, reporting harmful content about themselves or groups they belong to, and identifying if someone is a target of cyberbullying (Safer Internet Center,

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