Cyber-bullying among Secondary and Vocational Students in Bangkok

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to study the relationship between individual characteristics, the family context and cyber-bullying. We examine the nature, frequency, degree of violence and prevalence of cyber-bullying using data from a survey of 1,200 secondary and vocational students in Bangkok. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The results showed a considerable degree of cyber-bullying among Thai youth. More than half had ever seen or heard of cyber-bullying occurring to their friends. About 11.0% of students had seen or heard online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language more than 6 times per month. The potential relationship between cyber-bullying and duration of using the internet, family relationships, experience of violence in the family and family income is also examined.

Keywords: cyber-bullying, individual characteristics, family context, secondary students, vocational students

Background

Violence is a problem that occurs at every level of society, whether individual, family, in school, in the community or globally. Bullying among students is one kind of violence that has received growing attention around the world. Thailand is one country where this violence has been found in schools; one survey found 40% of students being bullied, ranking Thailand second after Japan where 60% were bullied (Tapanya, 2007). Other ranked countries included the United Kingdom and United States of America at 20-25 percent. The bullying of students has resulted in several reported suicides in countries when students could not stand the pressure from bullying (Shaheen, 2008*).*

Bullying behaviors are various. Because of technological advances and the development of unlimited communication systems, the cyber world is a channel allowing anyone to have more bullying choices. New types of bullying can occur at any time and any place. At present, there is a newly emerging bullying method called cyber-bullying, which uses electronic tools such as the mobile phone and computer. Cyber-bullying includes posting messages that blame, insult, or mock the victim. It also includes posting others' personal video clips on the internet, sending or distributing distorted information aiming to harm others, and deleting or blocking others from the on-line networking society (Kowalski and Limber, 2007). This is an efficient form of

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communication as information is disseminated rapidly and others can become involved to know and share opinions independently.

There are many effects caused by cyber-bullying, particularly in adolescents. Adolescents are at an age of rapid changes and adaptation. Moreover, adolescents need acceptance from friends and society so the influence of peers is critical during this period. Bullied persons feel hurt and ashamed. Some adolescents who are not accepted from the group or frequently bullied may be led to impulsive actions such as suicide. In the United States, Ryan Halligan, 13, was teased for several months after his classmates distributed a rumor via internet chats that he was gay. One female classmate who was a class star pretended to like Ryan and chatted with him via the internet. Later, she forwarded all chats to other friends. Ryan could not stand this pressure and committed suicide. Later, Gail Jones, 15, an English girl, committed suicide after her mobile phone rang every 30 minutes but no one talked when she picked up. Her father maintained that the last call of that night made her lose control. After Gail's death in 2000 and Ryan's death in 2003, use of the internet by young people has more increased; so it is possible that cyber-bullying has risen as well (McKenna, 2007).

In Japan, in July 2007 a student aged 18 committed suicide by jumping from a school building in Kobe because her classmate posted nude pictures of her on an unauthorized website and extorted her for money (Jamornman, 2008). In Thailand in 2009, reports in a daily newspaper cited a case where a video clip of a high school girl wearing a Girl Guide uniform holding down another female student while she is raped by her boyfriend wearing a Boy Scout uniform. This video clip has been distributed widely and resulted in the victim dropping out of school (*Thai Rath Daily Newspaper*, 2009). All in all, the subsequent effects of cyber-bullying are not only shame, stress and feelings of victimization, but can include dropping out of school and negative impacts on mental health.

At least two research studies have made claims that cyber-bullying can subsequently lead to more violent behavior if adolescents see bullying as normal behavior and do not recognize that this is a kind of violence (Rigby, 2002; Musikaphan, 2008). While cyber-bullying among students may not seem to be a serious issue, it may become a serious social problem with an increasing number of cases and degree of severity. Importantly, this problem can affect everyone as a reflection of public morality if it is not remedied. Moreover, cyber-bullying in children and adolescents does not originate from only one cause.

While violence in adolescents is a serious issue for society, no systematic research on cyber-bullying has been conducted in Thailand. For these reasons, this research examines the nature and forms of cyber-bullying, its prevalence, the degree of violence involved and the correlation between cyber-bullying and individual characteristics and the family context. The research was conducted in secondary and vocational schools located in Bangkok. Secondary students are experiencing a period of human development which may be related to cyber-bullying. Bangkok is a city where most youth can access to the internet and the majority has mobile phones. The results of this research can guide the planning, preventive measures and problem solutions for related agencies. The results obtained would also provide basic technical information necessary for coping with this problem.

Research Methodology

This research employed secondary data from the project "Surveys of Cyber-Bullying Behavior of Thai Youths in Bangkok" in which 2,000 secondary school, vocational school and university students were included. For this research, only the data from 1,200 male and female secondary and vocational students were analyzed. Sampling for the survey was conducted by categorizing schools into three zones, comprising the inner zone, central zone and outer zone of Bangkok. From each zone, 7 schools were selected; the selected schools included 6 governmental secondary schools, 5 governmental vocational schools, 5 private secondary schools, and 5 private vocational schools.

Descriptive statistics are used to present the characteristics of the sample and cyber-bullying experience. Differences in age, residence, level of education, school type, duration of using the internet, marital status of parents, family relationship, experience of violence in the family and family income that may affect cyber-bullying are also examined.

Results

Characteristics of the sample

The sample consists of 1,200 students; 57.3% are female and 42.7% are male. Most students are aged 14-16 years (46.8%). As described above, the sample consists of 800 students studying in governmental and private secondary schools with 400 students for each (33.3%). Another 400 students are drawn from vocational governmental and private schools (200 students each). Most students (68.0%) were living with their parents at the time of the survey. A total of 96.0% of the students owned mobile phones and 70.8% used the internet and emails. Most (78.3%) used the internet at home. About 44.8% used the internet every day and about 46.0% spent around 1-2 hours on average per session. The time of internet use of half of all students (50.3%) was from 06.01 – 09.00 p.m. (Table 1).

Table 1: Personal characteristics of the sample (N=1,200)

Personal characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	42.7
Female	57.3
Age	
11 - 13 years	16.8
14 - 16 years	46.8
17 - 22 years	36.4
School type	
Government secondary school	33.3
Private secondary school	33.3
Government vocational school	16.7
Private vocational school	16.7
Living arrangement	
Living with both parents	68.0
Living with either father or mother	12.9
Living with stepfather or stepmother	2.3
Living with friend in dormitory	6.3
Living with relatives	8.8
Others	1.7
Mobile phone ownership	
No	4.0
Yes	96.0
Internet and email usage	
Do not use internet or email	5.3
Use internet but not email	14.8
Use both internet and email	70.8
Use internet but email not specified	9.3
Place of internet usage	
At own home	78.3
At friend's home	2.3
At school	2.8
At internet café	14.3
Others	2.2
Frequency of internet usage	
Everyday	44.8
Often	29.2
Seldom	26.0
Duration of internet usage per session	
Less than 1 hour	3.9
1 – 2 hours	46.0
3 - 4 hours	32.4
5 - 6 hours	12.0
More than 6 hours	5.7
Time of internet use	
00.01 - 06.00 a.m.	0.8
06.01 - 09.00 a.m.	1.8
09.01 - 12.00 a.m.	4.4
00.01 - 03.00 p.m.	7.6
03.01 - 06.00 p.m.	13.7
06.01 - 09.00 p.m.	50.3
09.01 - 12.00 p.m.	21.4

Nature and factors related to cyber-bullying

This section examines family relationships, attitudes towards cyber-bullying, the nature and experience of cyber-bullying and types of cyber-bullying using descriptive statistics. For this study, family relationship has been categorized into 3 levels (poor, moderate and good) based on a score calculated from 15 questions on the family relationship. These questions ask about feelings of the students towards their parents and the family atmosphere. The results showed that most students rated their family relationship as good (65.8 percent) with 33.4 percent rating it as moderate and less than 1% as poor. To measure attitudes towards cyber-bullying, students were asked if they agreed with statements designed specifically for this purpose. Examples of these statements include "*I think cyber-bullying is a funny thing"; "I think cyber-bullying is a way for releasing personal feelings"; "I think people can freely do what they want to do, cyber-bullying included"; "I think cyber-bullying should be prohibited"; "I think cyber-bullying is a kind of violence*". The findings show that more than half of the students' attitude towards cyber-bullying was negative (54.8 percent) with 44.8% having mixed attitudes and less than 1% rating it positively (Table 2).

Table 2: Family relationship ratings and attitudes towards cyber-bullying among the sample

Family relationship	Percentage
15 – 35 points (Poor)	0.8
36 – 54 points (Moderate)	33.4
55 – 75 points (Good)	65.8
Total	100.0
Attitude towards cyber-bullying	
15 – 35 points (Negative)	54.8
36 – 54 points (Moderate)	44.8
55 – 75 points (Positive)	0.5
Total	100.0

The findings from this research suggest that much of the cyber-bullying occurred within the context of their social groups and relationships (76.2%). The respondents reported that they had heard of cyber-bullying by both female and male students and that they had heard of both male and female students as bullied victims. Normally, the cyber-bullying that they knew of was mainly done by only one student. Bullying by group was rare; this is in accordance with the study by Smith et al. (2008) which found that cyber-bullying was usually done by one or a few persons.

Regarding the frequency, degree of violence and prevalence of cyber-bullying, students were asked whether they had ever faced cyber-bullying themselves or heard about cyber-bullying occurring to their friends. The answers are grouped into categories ranging from "never" to as many as "6 times and more/month". If the incidence is less than one time/month, it is categorized to be "low level". Moderate level means the incidents occurring 2-3 times/month, and high level is more than 3 times/month. Results showed that cyber-bullying experiences were generally at a low level (Table 3).

Table 3: Cyber-bullying experiences among sampled students

Cyber-bullying experiences	Level
1. I have seen or heard of cyber-bullying through mobile phones	Low
2. I have seen or heard of cyber-bullying through the internet	Moderate
3. I have seen or heard of cyber-bullying through mobile phones and internet	Moderate
4. I have seen or heard of a female student who cyber-bullies	Low
5. I have seen or heard of a male student who cyber-bullies	Low
6. I have seen or heard of a female student who was cyber-bullied	Low
7. I have seen or heard of a male student who was cyber-bullied	Low
8. I have seen or heard of a student who was a cyber-bully alone	Low
9. I have seen or heard of a group of students who were cyber-bullies	Low

Types of cyber-bullying reported to be at a moderate level by the sampled students include using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language and repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages via mobile phones, chat room, e-mails or a website. Other types of cyber bullying were found to be at a low level. These included talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and then sharing it online; sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships; pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or to damage that person's reputation or friendships; repeated intense harassment and denigration including threats; and creating significant fear and intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group via mobile phones or internet. Using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language was found most frequently (78.3% reported seeing it at least once a month). This was followed by talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and then sharing it online (61.3%) and repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages (65.6%). Details about types, level and frequency of cyber-bullying are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Type of cyber-bullying reported by sampled students

Type of cyber-bullying	Level
1. Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language	Moderate
2. Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages	Moderate
3. Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online	Low
4. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships	Low
5. Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships	Low
6. Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear	Low
7. Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group	Low

Table 5: Experience of cyber-bullying by type and frequency of experience

Type of cyber-bullying	Frequency of experience (ever seen or heard)					
	Never	Seen/ heard 1 time/ month	Seen/ heard 2-3 times/ month	Seen/ heard 4-5 times/ month	Seen/ heard more than 6 times/ month	Total
1. Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language	23.6	28.7	27.2	11.4	11.0	100.0
2. Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages	34.4	24.6	27.7	9.0	4.4	100.0
3. Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information then sharing it online	38.7	23.9	23.6	6.0	8.8	100.0
4. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships	45.5	22.8	9.2	6.2	6.3	100.0
5. Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or damage reputation or friendships	45.2	22.8	20.3	7.4	4.3	100.0
6. Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear	45.6	24.6	17.1	6.9	5.7	100.0
7. Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group	45.6	25.0	19.9	6.2	3.2	100.0

Exploratory multivariate analysis (not shown here) reveals that the duration of internet use per session, family relationships experience of violence in the family and family income are found to have a significant relationship to cyber-bullying. Previous research has documented that duration of internet use is often related to improper internet behaviors of teenagers (Pomsoong, 2007). Some studies have found that family factors can affect children's inappropriate behavior (Connolly and Moore, 2003; Yodprang, 2007; Jankauskiene et al., 2008). Research by Norasatewiwat (2005) also found an association between family relationship problems and juvenile delinquency.

Conclusion

Findings showed that the most frequent form of cyber-bullying experienced by secondary and vocational school students was sending electronic messages with angry and vulgar language, an action with a moderate level of violence. More than half of secondary and vocational school students in this study had experience with cyber-bullying (52.4 percent).

Students who spent more than 6 hours per internet session had higher cyber-bullying experience than those spending less than 2 hours per each use. Interestingly, having good family relationships and never having been punished severely was associated with less cyber-bullying

experience. The students whose family income was in the range of 25,001-50,000 baht per month had a lower level of cyber-bullying experience than those whose family income was over 50,000 baht per month.

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