Parental Attitudes as a Predictor of Cyber Bullying among Primary School Children

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***Abstract**—Problem Statement:* Rapid technological developments of the 21st century have advanced our daily lives in various ways. Particularly in education, students frequently utilize technological resources to aid their homework and to access information. listen to radio or watch television (26.9 %) and e-mails (34.2 %) [26]. Not surprisingly, the increase in the use of technologies also resulted in an increase in the use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras and web sites by adolescents to bully peers. As cyber bullying occurs in the cyber space, lesser access to technologies would mean lesser cyber-harm. Therefore, the frequency of technology use is a significant predictor of cyber bullying and cyber victims.

Cyber bullies try to harm the victim using various media. These tools include sending derogatory texts via mobile phones, sending threatening e-mails and forwarding confidential emails to everyone on the contacts list. Another way of cyber bullying is to set up a humiliating website and invite others to post comments. In other words, cyber bullies use e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, pagers, mobile texts and online voting tools to humiliate and frighten others and to create a sense of helplessness. No matter what type of bullying it is, it negatively affects its victims. Children who bully exhibit more emotional inhibition and attribute themselves more negative self-statements compared to non-bullies.

Students whose families are not sympathetic and who receive lower emotional support are more prone to bully their peers. Bullies have authoritarian families and do not get along well with them. The family is the place where the children's physical, social and psychological needs are satisfied and where their personalities develop.

As the use of the internet became prevalent so did parents' restrictions on their children's internet use. However, parents are unaware of the real harm. Studies that explain the relationship between parental attitudes and cyber bullying are scarce in literature. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between cyber bullying and parental attitudes in the primary school.

Purpose of Study: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between cyber bullying and parental attitudes. A second aim was to determine whether parental attitudes could predict cyber bullying and if so which variables could predict it significantly.

Methods: The study had a cross-sectional and relational survey model. A demographics information form, questions about cyber bullying and a Parental Attitudes Inventory were conducted with a total of 346 students (189 females and 157 males) registered at various primary schools. Data was analysed by multiple regression analysis using the software package SPSS 16.

Research Results: T-test results calculated to test the significance of the regression coefficients of parental attitudes indicated that the most significant predictor was the authoritarian attitude. According to the results, parental attitudes explained for involvement in cyber bullying (5.4%), being cyber bullied (4%), cyber bullying others (6%), introducing oneself as someone else (2.9%) and re-introducing oneself as someone else (7.7%). 89 students (25.7%) stated that they cyber bullied once or more. 147 (42.4%) students were cyber bullied. Moreover, 153 (44.4%) students have introduced themselves as someone else either online or on mobile.

Research Findings and Further Research: This study indicated that the number of students who cyber bullied was more than that of the ones who were cyber victims.

***Keywords**—*Cyber bullying, cyber victim, parental attitudes, primary school students.

I. INTRODUCTION

RAPID technological developments of the 21st century have advanced our daily lives in various ways.

Particularly in education, students frequently utilize technological resources to aid their homework and to access information. The findings of a study conducted on 16.022 adolescents aged 14-17 revealed that %61.4 of the participants used internet at home and %60.7 used it outside the house. The adolescents used internet for a variety of purposes including course work (86.1 %), chat rooms (82.1 %), games (61 %), listening to radio or watching television (26.9 %) and e-mails (34.2 %) [26]. Not surprisingly, the increase in the use of technologies also resulted an increase in the use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras and websites by adolescents to bully peers [7]. "Cyber bullying" is defined as the use of internet or various digital technologies to deliberately harm others [1, 27, 22, 32]. As cyber bullying occurs in the cyber space, lesser access to technologies would mean lesser cyber-harm. Therefore, the frequency of technology use is a significant predictor of cyber bullying and cyber victims [23]. Internet over-users experience cyber bullying extensively [14].

In most societies bullying is a crucial issue for adolescents. To date various studies have investigated bullying [9, 28, 15, 8, 10]. Traditional bullying involves explicit physical acts (such as hitting and pushing) and verbal assault (ridiculing, name-calling) as well as social exclusion and spreading rumours [18]. Bullying and cyber bullying are significantly related [23]. Reference [31] argued that cyber bullying is a form of bullying and has three aspects. First, cyber bullying is anonymous, second it allows participation by an infinite

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audience and third sexual harassment is prevalent. Bullies, cyber bullies and their victims are usually close friends and almost 30% of bullies are also cyber bullies [22].

Bullies at school, compared to non-bullies, are more likely to cause harm using electronic communication tools [23]. Cyber bullies try to harm the victim using various media. These include sending derogatory texts via mobile phones, sending threatening e-mails and forwarding confidential emails to everyone on the contacts list. Another way of cyber bullying is to set up a humiliating website and invite others to post comments [7]. Cyber bullies assume that they have a real power on their victims. Cyber bullies use two fundamental electronic means to harm their victims. First, they send annoying e-mails or offensive, humiliating, insulting and defamatory instant messages from their personal computers. Second, they send texts to their victims' mobile phones [27]. In other words, cyber bullies use e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, pagers, mobile texts and online voting tools to humiliate and frighten others and to create a sense of helplessness [32]. Most cyber bullies are anonymous so that they can remain unidentified [31]. According to the results of a study conducted by [18] on 1,915 girls and 1,852 boys, the victims of electronic bullying (cyber bullying) stated that they were frequently bullied on instant messaging, then in chat rooms and on e-mail and least bullied on websites. Reference [11] found that both girls and boys were cyber bullied most frequently on MSN.

Research on cyber bullying is still in its infancy [20, 21, 23, 34, 35, 27]. Thus, contradictory results exist on the relationship between gender and cyber bullying. Gender plays a significant role in cyber bullying. Reference [3] concluded that although being a cyber victim and gender were not significantly related, males were involved in acts of cyber bullying more than were females. Males were also found to be potentially more inclined towards cyber bullying in the future. Reference [13] reported that among male students were both more cyber bullies and cyber victims than those among female students. However, according to [6] there were more female cyber bullies than males because females more regularly communicated via e-mail and text. [22] concluded that almost 60% of cyber victims were girls and more than 52% of cyber bullies were boys.

No matter what type of bullying it is, it negatively affects its victims. Children who bully exhibit more emotional inhibition and attribute themselves more negative self-statements compared to non-bullies [8]. Reference [27] concluded that students who were cyber bullied felt inhibited, angry and sad and thus their relationships within school, family and among friends were adversely affected. Reference [11] reported that when students were cyber bullied they felt sad and angry; they did not trust their friends and did not want to go to school. Bullies tend to be bold and aggressive [17]. According to [15] the more cyber bullied the students are, the less self-esteem they have. Moreover, being cyber bullied does not only lower self-esteem, but it also stimulates state-trait anxiety and depression symptoms [16]. Reference [34] concluded that young people with depression symptoms could be subject to greater cyber-harm. Repetitive acts of bullying increase the risk of depression and the feeling of guilt [25, 30]. Bullies are more extroverted, psychotic, and neurotic than children who are not bullies [8].

Students who are cyber bullied manifest active resistance than passive; 30.6% block either the unwelcome message or the person, 16.4% talk to the person to stop the danger/irritating situation, 8.1% change their usernames, 15% tell their friends and 10% tell their families about it. Reference [1] stated that students either block or ignore the sender as a coping strategy.

Students whose families are not sympathetic and who receive lower emotional support are more prone to bully their peers [29]. Bullies have authoritarian families and do not get along well with them [4]. The family is the place where the children's physical, social and psychological needs are satisfied and where their personalities develop.

Parental upbringing attitudes vary from society to society, culture to culture and even from family to family within the same society. Different family cultures give rise to different parental upbringing attitudes. Children in the preadolescent period require healthy parental attitudes in order to develop their own personalities and to maintain desirable relationships within the society. As the use of the internet became prevalent so did parents' restrictions on their children's internet use. However, parents are unaware of the real harm. Studies that explain the relationship between parental attitudes and cyber bullying are scarce in literature. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between cyber bullying and parental attitudes in the primary school.

II. METHOD

A. Population and Sample

The study had a survey research design. The population consisted of primary school students in Selçuklu, Konya, Turkey. The sampling method was random cluster sampling within the sixth, seventh and eighth grade students in the same area. The sample consisted of 346 students aged 11-15 ($\bar{x}$ = 13,09, Ss= 0,9736), 189 of which were girls and 157 were boys.

B. Data Collection Tools

Parental Attitudes Inventory

In order the determine the students' parents' attitudes the Parental Attitudes Inventory developed by Kuzgun (1972; cited in [19]). The scale consists of three dimensions: Democratic Parental Attitude, Authoritarian Parental Attitude and Protective-Demanding Parental Attitude. The five-point Likert scale has 40 items. The scale was graded as follows: not relevant (1), slightly relevant (2), partially relevant (3), highly relevant (4), completely relevant (5). The students were asked to read each item and choose the best expression (answer) in relation to their parents. The total score was then calculated based on the response given for each item between 1 and 5.

Questions about Cyber Bullying

Following demographics, students were provided with the functional definition of cyber bullying. The aim was to help students understand the meaning of cyber bullying as a

concept using the definition by [3] and to provide relevant examples. After the definition, the following questions were addressed:

Based on the above definition of cyber bullying (1) "Have you ever been involved in cyber bullying?" (1-Never, 2-Once, 3-Two-four times, 4-Five times or more). (2) "Have you ever been cyber bullied?" (1-Never, 2-Once, 3-Two-four times, 4-Five times or more). (3) "Do you think you will be involved in cyber bullying as a bully in the future?" (1-Yes, 2-I'm not sure, 3-No). The items were evaluated by two experts for clarity and overall quality. The language of the data collection tools was Turkish.

C. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated in order to investigate the relationship and interaction between cyber bullying and the sub-dimensions of parental attitudes. SPSS 16 for Windows statistical software was used for the analysis.

III. FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Questions about Cyber Bullying

89 students (25.7%) stated that they cyber bullied once or more than once. On the other hand, 147 students (42.4%) reported that they were cyber bullied. 153 students (44.3%) had introduced themselves as someone else on internet or on mobile phone.

TABLE I
PARENTAL ATTITUDES AS A PREDICTOR OF INVOLVEMENT IN CYBER BULLYING

Variables	Standard Error	β	t	p
Democratic	-.001	.005	-.213	.831
Authoritarian	.025	.008	3.213	.001
Protective	-.001	.006	-.130	.896

Note: R=0.232 R^2 =0.054 F=6.496 p=.000

Table 1 indicates that parental attitudes could predict students' acts of cyber bullying (*R=0.232 R^2 =0.054 F=6.496 p=.000*). Parental attitudes explained for 5.4% of cyber bullying. T-test results conducted to test the significance of regression coefficients indicated that the most important

TABLE II
PARENTAL ATTITUDES AS A PREDICTOR OF BEING CYBER BULLIED

Variables	Standard Error	β	t	p
Democratic	.004	.035	.599	.549
Authoritarian	.041	.268	3.682	.000
Protective	-.021	-.175	-2.568	.011

Note: R=0.20 R^2 =0.040 F=4.744 p=.001

predictor was the authoritarian attitude (β=.008).

Table 2 indicates that parental attitudes could predict being cyber bullied (*R=0.20 R^2 =0.040 F=4.744 p=.001*). Parental attitudes explained for 4% of being cyber bullied. T-test results conducted to test the significance of regression coefficients implied that the most important predictor was the authoritarian attitude.

TABLE III
PARENTAL ATTITUDES AS A PREDICTOR OF CYBER BULLYING OTHERS

Variables	Standard Error	β	t	p
Democratic	.004	.072	1.260	.209
Authoritarian	-.020	-.247	-3.426	.001
Protective	.005	.080	1.187	.236

Note: R=0.244 R^2 =0.060 F=7.224 p=.000

According to Table 3, parental attitudes could predict cyber bullying others (*R=0.244 R^2 =0.060 F=7.224 p=.000*). Parental attitudes explained for 6% of cyber bullying others. T-test results conducted to test the significance of regression coefficients showed that the most important predictor was the authoritarian attitude (β =.247).

TABLE IV
PARENTAL ATTITUDES AS A PREDICTOR OF INTRODUCING ONESELF AS SOMEONE ELSE

Variables	Standard Error	β	t	p
Democratic	-.004	-.037	-.634	.527
Authoritarian	.027	.194	2.642	.009
Protective	-.018	-.162	-2.355	.019

Note: R=0.171 R^2 =0.029 F=3.430 p=.000

Table 4 indicates that parental attitudes could predict introducing oneself as someone else (R=0.171 R^2 =0.029 F=3.430 p=.000). Parental attitudes explained for 2.9% of introducing oneself as someone else. T-test results conducted to test the significance of regression coefficients showed that

TABLE V
PARENTAL ATTITUDES AS A PREDICTOR OF RE-INTRODUCING ONESELF AS SOMEONE ELSE

Variables	Standard Error	β	t	p
Democratic	.006	.077	1.369	.172
Authoritarian	-.029	-.304	-4.250	.000
Protective	.012	.159	2.371	.018

Note: R=0.277 R^2 =0.077 F=9.505 p=.000

the most important predictor was the authoritarian attitude (β =.194).

Table 5 indicates that parental attitudes could predict re-introducing oneself as someone else (R=*0.277 R^2 =0.077 F=9.505 p=.000*). Parental attitudes explained for 7.7% of re-introducing oneself as someone else. T-test results conducted to test the significance of regression coefficients showed that the most important predictor was the authoritarian attitude (β =.304).

IV. DISCUSSION

As young people chat online and communicate with their peers via e-mail more, the use of internet, a significant risk factor for adolescents, has introduced cyber bullying as an emerging danger. The results of this study indicated that students' acts of cyber bullying up to date could be explained by parental attitudes.

T-test results to test the significance of regression coefficients of parental attitudes indicated that the most significant predictor was the authoritarian attitude. It could explain for students' involvement in cyber bullying (5.4%), being cyber bullied (4%), cyber bullying others (6%), introducing themselves as someone else (2.9%) and re-introducing themselves as someone else (7.7). Bullies have authoritarian (who use physical discipline) and aggressive, repudiating families [24, 4]. Oppressive and authoritarian attitude is a form of discipline which is firm, tough and strict and which restricts almost all behaviour of the child. Authoritarian parents are oppressive to their children. They tend to dominate their children, limit their behaviour and try to control and shape their life at all times. Authoritarian parental attitude might provoke children to be more insensitive and offensive to their peers in their social relations online.

Parents with democratic attitudes are able to orient their children to more realistic behaviour. They value their children and accept them as individuals. In an extremely strict and authoritarian family in which "discipline is enforced" and "discipline is achieved by denying love", the child under control has no idea what behaviour would stimulate what kind of reaction. Hence, the child could be extremely rebellious or extremely submissive in an anxious uncertainty [33]. Students who are cyber bullied are unwilling to tell their parents about it because they think they would not be allowed to use internet again [1]. That's why students put up with their cyber bullies [32]. Most families limit their children's online interaction with strangers and their attempts to disclose personal information. However, families rarely discuss dangers that could come from their friends and friends from school.

Another finding of this study suggested that 89 students (25.7%) cyber bullied at least once and 153 students (44.3%) introduced themselves as someone else on the internet or on mobile. Other research reported that 14.5% [22], 16.3% [18], 43.4% [23] of students cyber bullied others. In this study 147 (42.4%) of the students were cyber bullied. Related research also indicated that quite a few students were cyber bullied,

such as 36.1% [2], 72% [14], 24.9% [22], and 26.2% [18]. In the overall sample (N=666) 22.5% of the students (n=150) reported being engaged in cyber bullying at least once, and 55.3% of the students (n=368) reported being victims of cyber bullying at least once in their lifetime [12].

The research findings indicated that parents' incorrect attitudes led to cyber-harm. Oppressive, authoritarian attitude plays a role in cyber bullying which is harmful both for adolescents and their interactants in online social relations. Therefore, parents should have a more effective stance on their children's internet use and cooperate with the counsellor and teachers of the school. Likewise, preventive counselling services should be provided at schools in order to avoid cyber bullying which is prevalent among students. Moreover, in order to understand cyber bullying better, more research is needed with regards to cyber bullying among various groups as well as the relationship between cyber bullying and personal characteristics.

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