Exposure to cyberbullying in WhatsApp classmates‘ groups and classroom climate as predictors of students‘ sense of belonging: A multi-level analysis of elementary, middle and high schools

# Details

## Year

2020

## DOI

10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104614

## Issued

2020

## Language

English

## Volume

108

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Kashy-Rosenbaum G.;Aizenkot D.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Children and Youth Services Review

## Publisher

Elsevier BV

## Topics

Risks and harms

## Sample

Data were collected from 4,517 students (52% females) from 194 classes in 28 public schools: elementary schools, middle and high schools.

# Abstract

Children and adolescents currently conduct a large part of their social life in the virtual space. In Israel this
means the WhatsApp application which is the most popular social networking arena in the country. With the increased use of WhatsApp cyberbullying has also surged, referring to deliberate aggressive activity against individuals who share the same virtual social space. While cyberbullying takes place in the virtual social space, the bullying can easily expand over to the real social space, for example the classroom, negatively impacting classroom social climate and undermining students’ sense of belonging in class. This in turn may impair their mental well-being and further hinder their functioning. Using a multi-level approach, the present study aims to broaden the understanding of the connections between cyberbullying in WhatsApp classmate groups, classroom social climate (class-level factors) and students' sense of belonging in class (individual-level factor), across age and gender. The study included 4517 students (52% girls) in 4th through 12th grade (ages 9 to 17), in 194 homeroom classes in 28 schools in Israel. Participants completed online questionnaires. Study findings show a negative relationship between exposure to cyberbullying in WhatsApp classmate groups and class social climate and to student's sense of belonging in class. The educational implications are discussed.

# Outcome

The current study findings (Kashy-Rosenbaum Aizenkot, 2020) show that 56% of the students experienced cyberbullying victimization in their WhatsApp classmate groups. The study findings show that
personally experiencing cyberbullying as a victim in WhatsApp classmate groups at the individual and class level is related to students’ impaired sense of belonging in class. Furthermore, usage norms in
WhatsApp classmate groups were found to have an indirect effect on students’ sense of belonging, through classroom social climate at the class level and cyberbullying victimization at the individual level. Based on the research findings it can be said that students‘ sense of belonging is attributable, at least in part, to classroom social climate, and is higher in classrooms characterized by a positive social climate,
after controlling for gender and grade differences. Moreover, effective usage norms in WhatsApp classmate groups, such as lower WhatsApp classmate group member turnover and encouraging more classmates to be active in these groups, was also found to be directly and significantly related to reduced cyberbullying in WhatsApp classmate groups and indirectly related to students’ improved sense of belonging in class. It should be noted that female students reported slightly higher cyberbullying victimization compared
to male students.