Empathy online and moral disengagement through technology as longitudinal predictors of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration

Engl. transl.: Empathy online and moral disengagement through technology as longitudinal predictors of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration

# Keywords

* Empathy online
* Moral disengagement through technology
* Cyberbullying
* Risk and protective factors
* Longitudinal predictors

# Details

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## Sample

This study was conducted with a convenience sample of 1033 students between 11 and 17 years old (M = 13.66, SD = 1.64); 48.32% were girls. They were enrolled in 8 public and private schools in Seville, Cordoba, and Cordoba province (Andalusia, Spain). Participants were distributed among the grades as follows: Primary school, Grade 6: 19.43%; Secondary school, Grade 1: 23.87%, Grade 2: 17.39%, Grade 3: 19.70%, and Grade 4: 19.61%.
A part of the sample was missing for diverse reasons. Mainly, all the students in Grade 4 of secondary education who participated in Time 1 (N = 212) were not contacted again in Time 2 because they finished their secondary education before the second wave of data collection. Among the contacted students, data were missing for several reasons such as the anonymous code used to pair the subjects’ questionnaires being illegible or incomplete, students changed school or students absent during the data collection day for different reasons (individual absences, school trips, heatwave in the south of Spain).

## Implications For Parents About

## Other Parent Implication

The importance of parental risk awareness

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Stepping up awareness and empowerment
* Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

To develop digital literacy programms for families and schools adopting a positive socio-emotional perspective to prevent cyberbullying

# Abstract

Cyberbullying is a form of peer-aggression performed using electronic devices, by one or more individuals, with the intention to harm the cybervictims, who have difficulties in defending themselves. Diverse interpersonal variables such as empathy and mechanisms such as moral disengagement are involved in face-to-face and online interpersonal interactions. Many studies related empathy and moral disengagement to cyberbullying, but none have yet studied them together with online empathy and moral disengagement through technology. This study aimed to analyze the relationships among cyberbullying, online empathy, and moral disengagement through technology and to explore whether the dynamics established among those variables were stable over time. Participants were 1,033 students (age range 11–17 years old; M = 13.66; SD = 1.64; 48.32% girls) enrolled in public and private schools in the south of Spain. A second wave of data collection included 534 participants (52.17%; age range 12–18 years old; M = 14.10; SD = 1.33; 49.82% were girls). This study used a prospective longitudinal design. The results showed that high moral disengagement through technology was related to cyberbullying, especially in the cyberbully/victim role. The role of online empathy did not seem to have such a clear relation with cyberbullying. The need for more research in this area is highlighted.

# Outcome

The findings of the current study, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, contribute to a more precise understanding of cyberbullying. The longitudinal approach brings new insights regarding the role of some relatively novel predictors such as online empathy and moral disengagement through technology disentangled from correlates.
Results show that affective empathy was a predictor of cyberbullying expectations, and higher involvement in cybervictimization is related to higher levels of online empathy. The role of online empathy in cyberbullying does not seem to be clear results suggest that the effect of empathy, in its online dimension in the present study in cyberbullying, can become nonsignificant when other predictors are considered.
Results indicate that higher involvement in cybervictimization is related to higher levels of moral disengagement through technology. Higher involvement in cyberperpetration was related to higher levels of moral disengagement through technology. Nevertheless, a higher level of moral disengagement through technology was related to a higher level of online empathy which is a rather unexpected finding. Marín-López et al. (2020) point out that " It could be that the ability to understand and share other’s emotional states or contexts is sometimes related to undesirable personal traits related to being manipulative and Machiavellian ways of achieving goals such as callous-unemotional traits, low fearfulness or insensitivity to punishment". Moral justification through technology was found to be a risk factor for cyberperpetration.
Diverse results were cross-sectionally and longitudinally observed. A high level of moral justification through technology was related to more involvement in cyberbullying as a cyberperpetrator, and it was found to be a longitudinal predictor of cyberperpetration, becoming stronger one year later. Older age was related to being a cyberbully/victim cross-sectionally and one year later. High levels of moral justification through technology was cross-sectionally related to being a cyberbully/victim.

The authors conclude that to get a more complete understanding of moral disengagement mechanisms, more studies are needed to examine the reasons why cyberperpetrators morally disengage, in order to tackle cyberbullying by educating young people from a socio-emotional and positive perspective. Marín-López et al. (2020) point out that "It could help to tackle not only cyberbullying but also other online antisocial behaviors such as cyberhate or cybercrime, and therefore holistic interventions are needed". The authors conclude that future research with representative samples and cross-cultural and cross-national studies could shed new light on cyberbullying and its relationship with online empathy and moral disengagement through technology in different contexts.

[Extracted by the coder from the original/main research text]