Patterns of cybervictimization and emotion regulation in adolescents and adults

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## Sample

Two samples were used to be compared:
(1) 1,715 students between 10 and 15 years old (54% female) in the first year of secondary education from 13 randomly selected schools the province of Antwerp in Belgium.
(2) 1,426 employees (46% male), who were recruited from different Flemish organizations in Belgium. The majority was highly educated: 67% of the participants had more than a high school degree. 92% of them worked in the public sector. Their mean age was 42 years (range 18-69).

# Abstract

Research on cyberbullying has boomed in the past two decades. Findings from studies
among adolescents suggest that they can be classified into distinct groups based on their
cyberbullying experience, and that cyberbullying seems to be related to poor emotion regulation.
So far, only a few studies have examined cyberbullying among adult workers and it is unclear
whether cyberbullying develops similarly in that population. Therefore, in this study
cyberbullying victimization was assessed in adolescents and adult workers simultaneously to
address three aims: (1) to explore which groups can be distinguished based on their
cyberbullying experience, (2) to analyze the associations of group membership with the way
people regulate their emotions, and (3) to examine whether the results are comparable in
adolescents and adults. Latent class analysis was used to analyze data from 1,426 employees and
1,715 adolescents in the first year of secondary education (12-13 years old). In each population,
three profiles differing in their patterns of cybervictimization were identified: no
cybervictimization (80%), work-related cybervictimization (18%), and pervasive
cybervictimization (3%) for adults, and no cybervictimization (68%), similar-to-offline
cybervictimization (27%), and pervasive cybervictimization (4%) for adolescents. Furthermore,
these profiles differed in their use of emotion regulation strategies, with pervasive cyber-victims
suppressing their emotions significantly more than other groups. Future research is needed to
clarify the role of emotion regulation in cyberbullying as an antecedent or consequence of
victimization.

# Outcome

"The results of latent class analyses indicated three distinguishable profiles of cybervictimization in both populations: (1) no cybervictimization (80%), (2) work-related cybervictimization (18%), and (3) pervasive cybervictimization (3%) among adults, and (1) no cybervictimization (68%), (2) similar-to-offline cybervictimization (27%), and (3) pervasive cybervictimization (4%) among adolescents. Despite their very different context, some similarities in this phenomenon exist: Either individuals are not cyberbullied at all, or they experience is similar to traditional cyberbullying behavior, or they experience almost all types of negative online behavior.
But there are significant differences. In adolescents, the cyberbullied groups suppressed their emotions significantly more than the other groups, while the non-victimized group used reappraisal significantly more than the other groups. Fewer adults than adolescents reported experiencing cybervictimization (20 % versus 32%), which might be related to differences in exposure to and use of ICT. Cyberbullied adolescents used significantly fewer adjusting emotion regulation strategies than noncyberbullied adolescents. Overall, the associations with emotion regulation appeared to be stronger for adolescents than for adults, which might be an indication that emotion regulation has
a stronger link with cyberbullying involvement in adolescence than later in life. Furthermore, negative emotionality motivates people to engage in risky behavior in order to escape these aversive emotional states and this behavior again heightens the chance of becoming victimized online. They therefore believe that individuals who often suppress their emotions are at greater risk of becoming victimized, while reappraisal acts as a protective factor." (Vranjes et al., 2018, pp. 16-20)