Cyber Bullying Experiences among Grade-9 students: An input to Cyber Safe Prevention Program

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Abstract: This study aimed to address the cyber bullying experiences of Grade- 9 students to develop a localized Cyber Safe Prevention Program which will be recommended to become a part of Anti-Bullying Policy in Manuel S. Enverga Memorial School of Arts and Trades. This study used the descriptive survey applied to determine the cases of cyber bullying incidence and perception of Grade 9 students towards their cyber bullying experiences. It was conducted at Manuel S. Enverga Memorial School of Arts and Trades, Mauban North District. Purposive sampling technique was used. The data of this study was obtained through the use of two sets checklist-questionnaire. The following findings were revealed: In cyber bullying in social media the highest score got a WAM of 2.57 entailed having my photos cropped or edited resulting to negative comments and reactions online; cyber bullying incidents in personal messages got thehighest WAM of 2.52 entailed receiving indecent words through online. Therespondent's perception on cyber bullying got a WAM of 3.5 entailed it develops mental health problems. Thus, the researcher crafted Cyber Safe Prevention Program.Cyber Safe Prevention Program created to encourage in promoting Online Child Protection and prevent online child abuse, wherein the students mightrealize that theycan use and enjoy the Internet safely.

Keywords: Cyber Bullying, Cyber Safe, Cyber Bullying Prevention Program

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is considered to be one of the most prevalent problems in the educational system. Students have reported experiencing numerous cases of bullying. As the cases are becoming worse and graver, the need to solve and address this issue is deemed necessary.

The time teens are spending on digital devices has given rise to cyberbullying. Especially with national stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as kids spend more time online, they are more likely to fall victim to cyberbullying. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, people around the world, including kids, are spending 20 percent more time on social media than they were pre-pandemic.

Cyberbullying National Research (2020) reports that 21 percent of cyberbullying reports occurred from January to July 2020, targeting parents of children between the ages of 10 and 18. The correlation between this increase and the increased online time during COVID-19 lockdowns is evident. As of January 2020, 44 percent of all internet users in the U.S. said they had experienced online harassment.

As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in kids and teens using digital platforms, not just for personal use but also for educational purposes. Social distancing guidelines force many young people to have only virtual contact with their peers. As a result, young people are using social platforms like TikTok, Zoom, and others more frequently than in the past. While there are benefits to online interactions, such as connecting kids to the

outside world, they do not eliminate the risks (Patchin, 2020).

Also, Huesken (2020) emphasized that cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies (for example, cellular phones, digital cameras, and computers) to engage in deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group with the intention of harming others. Cyberbullying may include cyber harassment, cyber stalking, and the invasion of privacy, all of which constitute violations of the Student Code of Conduct. Cyberbullying can cause significant harm to students, including loss of reputation, humiliation and embarrassment, clinical depression, fear, and anxiety, loss of self-esteem, and even self-injurious and suicidal behavior.

The Philippine government, through DepEd, emphasized the promotion of violence-free schools, urging students, parents, school teachers, and the entire community to fight and end all forms of violence against schoolchildren (Fernandez, 2014).

According to the Manila Bulletin (2019), a survey shows that three young people in 30 countries said they have been victims of online bullying, with one in five saying they skipped school due to cyberbullying and violence, according to a new poll released by UNICEF, the United Nations organization working for children's rights.

However, in the Philippines, the latest national data show that cyberviolence affects almost half of children aged 13–17. The prevalence of cyberviolence for males (44 percent) is almost the same as for females (43 percent).

Thus, violence against children, in all its forms, including online bullying or cyberbullying, has devastating effects on the physical and emotional wellbeing of young people. This can create lasting emotional and psychological scars, even physical harm. It is especially difficult to address because children are vulnerable and have easy access to the internet, making them easy targets for online violence. Given that there is already a policy or law for treating cyberbullying cases, a school-based cybersafety handbook is necessary to localize the resolution of such cases.

The Manuel S. Enverga Memorial School of Arts and Trades, as an institution, has documented a variety of bullying incidents; however, the pandemic has primarily observed bullying on social media, which is why it became the study's focus.

In terms of cyberbullying incidents, MSEMSAT is not an exception. Additionally, the MSEMSAT researcher's initial survey revealed that 54 Grade 9 students encountered various forms of bullying. Out of 54 students, 44 responded that they experienced cyberbullying incidents. (March Survey, 2022).

The researcher herself, as a teacher, has observed bullying activities online among the learners. As a result, cyberbullying has become a pervasive and increasing problem worldwide.

Given the alarming nature of cyberbullying incidents, the researcher recognizes the criticality of identifying these incidents within the institution for immediate resolution. She also aims to determine the students' perceptions of cyberbullying in Grade 9.

In conjunction with this, cyberbullying is a major concern for parents and teachers. The Department of Education's anti-bullying website provides advice to parents and teachers on how to identify and respond to cyberbullying in order to keep children and young people safe online.

In response to the call for responsibility to address this issue, the researcher hopes to solve cyberbullying issues and problems. This case should be addressed and solved in consonance with Republic Act 10627, also known as the "Anti-Bullying Act of 2013." As part of the government's fight against bullying, it is the responsibility of the school to create its own procedure and scheme for child protection in relation to RA 10627 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) developed by the Department of Education (DepEd).

Based on these readings, the researcher proposed Cyber SAFE (Cyber Youth Bullying Ethical Resources to Secure Ambience First for Education) as a program to address cyberbullying incidents among students. The researcher will design and develop Cybersafe, a handbook that includes examples of cyberbullying, strategies for coping with it, and ethical guidelines for using technology.

Statements of the Problem

This research aimed to address the cyber bullying experiences of Grade-9 students. Specifically, it sought to answer to the following questions:

1. What are the cyber bullying incidents experienced by Grade-9 students in MSEMSAT in social media and personal messages;

2. What are the perception of Grade-9 students in cyber bullying?

3. What proposed anti-bullying policy can be used to address cyber bullying incidents?

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical structure was anchored in two main scaffolds: the General Strain Theory developed by Robert Agnew and Social Learning Theory developed by Albert Bandura.

General strain theory supports the assumption that negative experiences can lead to strain or stress. Victimization is considered a stressful experience, and according to this theory, experiences of stress or strain may cause a person to perform a positive or negative action to decrease the stress or strain.

Meanwhile, Agnew (2010) posed that individuals experience "strain"- exposure to hostile behavior, for example. In effect, negative emotions on the victim's part are produced. These include anger, frustration, depression, or anxiety which may lead to corrective actions like wrongdoing, self-harm, suicide, or critical behavior against others. The strain is further aggravated by lack of help from people who are unaware of or indifferent in the bullying instance taking place.

In contrary, Faris and Felmee (2012) argued that sociological studies differently claim that bullying can be understood in a "social network perspective," that bullying is one type of aggression associated with attaining and maintaining peer group status rather than a maladjusted reaction for a socially marginal individual. They contend individuals at the very bottom of the social hierarchy lack capacity to bully, while individuals at the very top have no reason to bully. Hypothetically, if the purpose of bullying is to achieve higher status, like getting popular from being nobody, future outcomes may be affected either positively or negatively.

Furthermore, Ericksen (2012) stated that based to record, the very first data on bullying prevalence in schools were collected by Dr. Dan Olweus in 1983 with more than 40,000 students, age eight to sixteen. It revealed that one out of every seven students suffer from victimization.

Another theory that was considered was the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura. According to Trinidad (2013), aggression is learned through a process called behavior modeling. He believes that individuals do not actually inherit violent tendencies, but they model them. He explains three aspects: First, how aggressive patterns of behavior are developed; second, what provokes people to behave aggressively, and third, what determines whether they are going to continue to resort to an aggressive behavior pattern in future occasions or not. Children are said to be good imitators. Whatever incident that happens at home and school, whether they have just seen it or experienced it, they will acquire it and soon manifest this in their behavior at home and in school. Albert Bandura argued that

individuals, especially children, learn aggressive responses from observing others, either personally or through the media and environment. This reinforcement can be formulated by teachers and parents through different strategies such as reduction of tension, gaining financial rewards, or gaining praise of others, giving enrichment activities, or building self-esteem.

Moreover, Social Learning Theory reflects the understanding that a person learns and develops attitudes, behaviors, and emotional reactions by observing others' actions. It combines cognitive and behavioral learning theory. Cyber bullying incidents may influence ones' empathy due to what a person observes or experiences. Along with other factors that may also affect someone's empathy, a person might, or might not, engage in cyberbullying.

In relation to the current study, the aforementioned theories may be reconciled by realizing that the general strain theory and social learning theory are all significant in determining the cyber bullying incidents, perceptions on cyber bullying, and development of school's handbook. It is further supported by literatures that with consciousness on bullying incidents and preventive strategies, anyone can proactively respond to and address relative issues.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The emergence of technology in society has undeniably transformed communication dynamics, but it has also ushered in a new form of aggression known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, as defined by Antonio (2014), encompasses various malicious acts perpetrated through electronic means, often stemming from motives such as revenge, hatred, or sheer boredom.

Regio (2013) delineates the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying, which manifests through different channels like social media platforms and personal messaging systems. Examples include photo manipulation, account hacking, dissemination of derogatory content, and sending harassing messages. These insidious behaviors, highlighted by Abad (2013), have significant implications, tarnishing reputations and causing emotional distress to victims.

The prevalence of cyberbullying is alarming, with the Philippines ranking fourth globally in searches related to this issue, as reported by Lai (2013). Despite efforts to address cyberbullying through legislation such as the Cybercrime Prevention Law of 2012, concerns have been raised regarding its potential impact on freedom of speech, as discussed by Amper (2014). The ambiguity surrounding online libel provisions has sparked debates over the law's interpretation and its implications for online expression.

In examining the psychological underpinnings of cyberbullying, studies by Duff (2019) and Chae (2017) shed light on the role of social comparisons and image editing in online behaviors. Women, in particular, are found to engage in frequent photo editing, driven by societal pressures and the desire for validation. Barry and Horan (2018) further explore the relationship between personality traits and online behavior, underscoring the influence of factors like body dissatisfaction and narcissism.

However, the ramifications of cyberbullying extend beyond mere online interactions, affecting victims' mental health and well-being. Lee and Shannen (2021) highlight the detrimental effects of cyberbullying, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Victims often experience social withdrawal, academic difficulties, and low self-esteem, as noted by Dreaker (2012) and Arsenwelt (2016).

Moreover, cyberbullying perpetuates a culture of negativity and insecurity, as emphasized by Dudley (2020). Victims may internalize hurtful comments and criticisms, leading to a negative self-image and diminished self-worth. Rubin (2014) advocates for proper netiquette as a means to foster respectful online interactions and mitigate the spread of

cyberbullying.

To address cyberbullying effectively, a concerted effort involving educators, students, and families is imperative. Prevention programs should prioritize raising awareness of cyberbullying, promoting ethical technology use, and instilling digital citizenship skills. Educators, in particular, play a crucial role in imparting knowledge on responsible online behavior and fostering a culture of empathy and respect in school communities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative approach, employing a descriptive survey methodology to investigate the prevalence of cyberbullying incidents within the school and to assess the perceptions of Grade 9 students regarding their experiences with cyberbullying.

The descriptive survey method enables the collection of data to describe and analyze characteristics of a phenomenon, in this case, cyberbullying, in a systematic and structured manner. Through surveys, researchers can gather quantitative data from a large sample of participants, providing insights into the frequency, extent, and nature of cyberbullying occurrences.

In this study, Grade 9 students are the primary focus of investigation, allowing researchers to gauge their firsthand experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying within the school environment. By administering a standardized questionnaire to the participants, researchers can gather quantitative data on various aspects related to cyberbullying, such as the frequency of incidents, the methods employed, the impact on victims, and the response mechanisms in place.

The quantitative nature of the study facilitates the analysis of numerical data, enabling researchers to identify patterns, trends, and correlations within the dataset. Statistical techniques, such as frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and inferential analyses, may be employed to derive meaningful insights from the collected data.

Locale of the Study and Population Sampling

The study was conducted at Manuel S. Enverga Memorial School of Arts and Trades – Mauban North District.

Utilizing purposive sampling, the researcher selected Grade 9 students from MSEMSAT who had firsthand experience with cyberbullying. This method allowed for the intentional selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives.

The decision to focus on Grade 9 students was informed by observations made by teachers, indicating high levels of online activity among this demographic. Many students were noted to spend significant amounts of time on social media platforms, with some lacking awareness of proper online conduct. Despite the prevalence of cyberbullying incidents, some cases may have been overlooked during the pandemic.

Initial survey findings conducted at MSEMSAT highlighted the extent of cyberbullying experiences among Grade 9 students. Out of 54 respondents, 44 reported encountering various forms of cyberbullying, including negative comments on their profile pictures, online gossip, photo editing, and receiving threatening messages from both known individuals and strangers (March Survey, 2022).

By purposively selecting Grade 9 students with firsthand experiences of cyberbullying, the study aims to capture comprehensive insights into the prevalence, nature,

and impact of cyberbullying within the school community. This targeted approach ensures that participants possess relevant experiences to contribute meaningfully to the study's objectives, enhancing the validity and relevance of the research findings.Research

Instrumentation

The study used two sets of checklists- questionnaire. The first instrument was checklist concerning the cyber bullying incidents experienced by Grade-9 students in terms of social media and personal messages to be more specific. The second instrument was the checklist including their perception on cyber bullying. The sets of instruments were validated by the JHS and SHS guidance counselors, in-charge from MSEMSAT and one Master Teacher. The researcher also translated the questionnaire in Filipino to easily understand by the respondents. So, the instrument was validated also by the English and Filipino teachers of MSEMSAT before giving to the respondents.Recommendations during the validation was considered in the revision of the questionnaire before it will be actually used by the respondents.

Data Gathering Procedure

The action research study on cyberbullying prevention followed a systematic process to ensure validity, reliability, and practical application of its findings. The researcher began by submitting a proposal to the school research committee and district secretariat, seeking technical assistance. After revisions, the proposal was resubmitted to the school research coordinator and Public Schools District Supervisor (PSDS) for approval, leading to the issuance of certification to proceed. Subsequently, permission was sought from the school head to conduct the study.

The researcher formulated checklist questionnaires based on related information and underwent validation and reliability testing among guidance counselors and English teachers, incorporating feedback into the final instruments. Upon approval, the questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of the respondents' advisers, and data were collected through coordinated efforts. Following data collection, responses were tallied, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical treatments. Finally, the researcher developed a school-based prevention program called "CYBER SAFE" based on the results of the data gathered. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough examination of cyberbullying within the school community and facilitated the implementation of targeted prevention strategies.

Ethical Considerations

This research undertaking strictly follows the Data Privacy Act. The researcher secured the parents and students' consent in the study. The data that will be gathered on this research will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The data will only be used as basis in the data collection to generate the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cyber Bullying Incidents Experienced by the Respondents

The study revealed that cyberbullying incidents on social media were relatively infrequent among the respondents, with an overall weighted average mean of 1.86. The least common experience, with a weighted average mean of 1.45, involved instances where students were

included in online polls enabling peers to vote on undesirable characteristics such as physical appearance. Conversely, the highest reported experience, with a mean of 2.57, pertained to having photos cropped or edited resulting in negative comments and reactions online.

Related research by Duff (2019) highlighted the tendency for women to edit photos more frequently than men before posting them online. This behavior, attributed to social comparisons and the desire to avoid negative comments, underscores the influence of appearance-related factors on online behavior. Chae (2017) further emphasized the link between selfie-taking frequency and editing frequency, suggesting that social comparisons with friends contribute to increased editing behaviors. Moreover, Duff (2019) discussed methods such as cropping, using filters, and Photoshop to improve appearance in photos, reflecting efforts to mitigate cyberbullying risks.

Barry and Horan (2018) delved into the relationship between personality factors and the types of photos posted on social media, highlighting how characteristics such as body dissatisfaction, narcissism, and sexualization influence online behavior. They noted that social networking activities can shape the feedback photos receive, with traits like enjoyment of sexualization and narcissism potentially fueling cyberbullying behaviors. The ease with which content can be shared online underscores the importance of understanding the impact of posted content on individuals' experiences of cyberbullying.

The study further revealed that cyberbullying incidents through personal messages were relatively uncommon among the respondents, with an overall weighted average mean of 2.07. The least reported experience, with a weighted average mean of 1.32, involved receiving false or derogatory messages aimed at damaging one's reputation or friendships. Conversely, the highest reported experience, with a WAM of 2.52, was receiving indecent words through online communication channels.

Sardea (2016) highlighted the growing complexity of issues related to free expression among students, both within and outside of school grounds, due to the proliferation of internet usage. While the internet offers new avenues for positive communication, it also introduces various means for threatening, harassing, insulting, and bullying others.

Moreover, Morgan (2016) emphasized the diverse forms that cyberbullying can take, including threats, blackmail, the dissemination of harsh and indecent words, texting/chatting unpleasant messages/images, and impersonation tactics. These behaviors can have serious emotional and psychological impacts on victims, contributing to distress and feelings of insecurity.

Additionally, Morgan underscored the importance of educating children about the risks associated with sharing personal information online and the potential for it to be misused by others. Despite efforts to mitigate cyberbullying, the study found that specific incidents were not reported by the respondents, suggesting a need for continued vigilance and education on cyber safety.

Overall, the prevalence of cyberbullying among young people underscores the importance of promoting responsible digital citizenship and fostering safe online environments to prevent harm and support the well-being of all individuals involved.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions can be drawn:

In terms of cyberbullying incidents, it was observed that the most distinguished experience among respondents on social media involved having their photos cropped or edited, leading to negative comments and reactions online. Conversely, the most common

cyberbullying experience in personal messages was receiving indecent words through online communication channels.

Furthermore, cyberbullying has a significant impact on the mental health and self-confidence of the respondents. Victims of cyberbullying reported experiencing mental health problems and a decrease in self-confidence, hindering their ability to interact effectively in society.

This study highlights the importance of crafting a relevant cyberbullying prevention program tailored to address the specific incidents occurring at MSEMSAT. Given the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying on students, implementing effective prevention strategies is crucial for promoting a safe and supportive learning environment.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the researcher recommends the following actions:

MSEMSAT students should actively promote the CYBERSAFE prevention program by engaging in recommended activities aimed at fostering harmonious relationships among students and teachers. This may include organizing awareness campaigns, participating in workshops or seminars, and actively supporting peers who may be experiencing cyberbullying.

Teachers are encouraged to support the school administrator in utilizing the CYBERSAFE prevention program as a tool to minimize cyberbullying incidents within the school. This may involve incorporating cyberbullying prevention modules into the curriculum, facilitating discussions on digital citizenship and online safety, and actively monitoring students' online activities.

The school administrator should take proactive steps to implement the CYBERSAFE prevention program effectively and appropriately to address cyberbullying incidents at MSEMSAT. This may include establishing clear policies and procedures for reporting and addressing cyberbullying, providing resources and support for students and staff, and fostering a culture of respect and empathy both online and offline.

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