

Adolescents' Methods for Coping with Cyberbullying

Ergenlerin Siber Zorbalık ile Başa Çıkma Yöntemleri

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Objectives: In this study, we aimed to examine the methods of coping with cyberbullying in adolescents and the factors affecting these methods. In addition, we want to provide a new perspective on the approach strategies to be applied in the clinical approach to the cyberbullying victimization of adolescents.

Materials and Methods: One hundred sixty-one high school student adolescents who applied to Pamukkale University, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic for any reason were included in our study. In the Scale on Coping with Cyber Bullying (SCCB), we applied to adolescents; methods for coping with cyberbullying were determined as seeking social support, seeking help, struggling, and online security. The sociodemographic data form and Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire were also administered to the participants.

Results: It was determined that the most preferred method in coping with cyberbullying is online security. The increase in the hyperactivity/inattention score was found to increase the scores of seeking social support ($b=0.218$; $p=0.004$), seeking help ($b=0.216$; $p=0.004$), and online security scores ($b=0.227$; $p=0.004$). The increase in the scores in the prosocial scale had an increasing effect on the scores in seeking social support ($b=0.284$; $p=0.0001$), seeking help ($b=0.293$; $p=0.0001$), struggling ($b=0.246$; $p=0.001$), and online security ($b=0.198$; $p=0.009$). It was found that being male had a lower effect on seeking social support ($b=-0.163$; $p=0.026$) and struggling scores ($b=-0.254$; $p=0.002$). Increasing conduct problem scale scores had a lowering effect on online security scores ($b=-0.249$; $p=0.001$).

Conclusion: We believe that identifying the fields where young people have problems and knowing their effects on coping strategies in case of exposure to cyberbullying will be important in planning clinical approaches to be applied to young people exposed to cyberbullying. Supporting the mechanisms that young people use less often and strengthening the mechanisms they use frequently will prevent the occurrence of possible accompanying psychiatric comorbidities.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, adolescent, coping methods

Amaç: Çalışmamızda; ergenlerin siber zorbalıkla baş etme yöntemlerini ve bu yöntemlere etki eden faktörleri incelemeyi amaçladık. Bunun yanında, ergenlerin siber zorbalık mağduriyetine yönelik klinik yaklaşımda uygulanacak yaklaşım stratejilerine baş etme mekanizmalarının kullanımı açısından yeni bir bakış açısı kazandırarak gelecek çalışmalar için fikir oluşturmayı hedeflemekteyiz.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Pamukkale Üniversitesi, Çocuk ve Ergen Psikiyatrisi Polikliniğine herhangi bir nedenle başvuran 161 lise öğrencisi ergen çalışmamıza dahil edilmiştir. Ergenlere uyguladığımız siber zorbalıkla başa çıkma ölçeğinde; siber zorbalıkla baş etme yöntemleri, sosyal destek arama, yardım arama, mücadele etme ve çevrimiçi güvenlik olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Katılımcılara ayrıca sosyo-demografik veri formu ve Güçler ve Güçlükler Anketi uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular: Siber zorbalıkla baş etmede en çok tercih edilen yöntemin çevrimiçi güvenlik olduğu belirlenmiştir. Hiperaktivite/dikkatsizlik puanındaki artışın sosyal destek arama ($b=0,218$; $p=0,004$), yardım arama ($b=0,216$; $p=0,004$) ve çevrimiçi güvenlik puanlarını ($b=0,227$; $p=0,004$) artırdığı bulunmuştur. Prososyal ölçekteki puanların artması, sosyal destek arama ($b=0,284$; $p=0,0001$), yardım arama ($b=0,293$; $p=0,0001$), mücadele etme ($b=0,246$; $p=0,001$) ve çevrimiçi güvenlik puanları ($b=0,198$; $p=0,009$) üzerinde artırıcı bir etkiye sahip olduğu saptanmıştır. Erkek olmanın sosyal destek arama ($b=-0,163$; $p=0,026$) ve mücadele etme puanları ($b=-0,254$; $p=0,002$) üzerinde düşürücü bir etkiye sahip olduğu bulunmuştur. Davranış sorunu ölçeği puanlarının artışının, çevrimiçi güvenlik puanları ($b=-0,249$; $p=0,001$) üzerinde düşürücü bir etkiye sahip olduğu görülmüştür.

Sonuç: Siber zorbalığa maruz kalan gençlere uygulanacak klinik yaklaşımların planlanmasında gençlerin sorun yaşadıkları alanların belirlenmesi ve bunların siber zorbalığa maruz kalma durumlarında başa çıkma stratejilerine etkisinin bilinmesinin önemli olacağını düşünmekteyiz. Gençlerin daha az kullandıkları mekanizmaların desteklenmesi ve sıklıkla kullandıkları mekanizmaların güçlendirilmesi, eşlik etmesi olası psikiyatrik eş tanılarının oluşmasını engelleyebilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siber zorbalık, ergen, baş etme yöntemleri

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Introduction

Access to the internet and text messaging have affected social communication among young people in recent years. Most teenagers have a personal computer or cell phone. In this way, they can communicate with several people at the same time every day and are exposed to the effects and potentially harmful reflections of immediate contact.¹ Rapid technological changes, the anonymity of the perpetrator, and potentially large audiences make preventing cyberbullying more complex than traditional bullying. Therefore, policymakers, educators, parents, and adolescents themselves should be aware of the potentially harmful effects of cyberbullying.² According to Patchin and Hinduja³, cyberbullying is defined as deliberate and repetitive harm to another person through the use of computers, mobile phones, or electronic devices. When the incidence of cyberbullying was examined, it was stated that it was between 6.8% and 35.4% in a review study.⁴ 20-40% of young people stated that they had experienced at least one cyberbullying experience during adolescence, and the number of cyber victims is increasing.⁵

Cyberbullies also had high conduct problems, hyperactivity, frequent smoking and drunkenness, and low prosocial behavior.² The use of instant messaging applications, blogging, and chat rooms has been associated with harassment from the internet.⁶ Another study found a relationship between cyberbullying and school problems.⁷

Traditionally, coping strategies fall into two categories. These are the transactional model⁸ and the approach-avoidance model.⁹ According to the transactional model, it is described as problem-focused and emotion-focused. In this model, there are primary and secondary evaluation processes. The primary process involves assessing whether an event is a threat, and the secondary process involves choosing a specific coping strategy that is appropriate to the resources available to the individual.⁸ For example, a student who approaches the event with a problem-oriented approach may directly resist cyberbullying or seek help from those around him/her. A student who approaches the event with an emotional focus may cry and want to comfort herself/himself by thinking that there are more important life events to worry about.¹⁰ According to the approach-avoidance model, the individual evaluates whether he/she has sufficient resources to cope with the situation and then chooses either the approach mode (focused on solving the problem directly) or the avoidance mode.⁹ For example, a student who uses the approach strategy may face the cyberbully instead of ignoring the event. Students who use the avoidance strategy can delete threatening messages and ignore cyberbullies.⁹

Coping strategies used to manage cyberbullying include trusting friends and teachers, staying offline, not using the websites/software used by the bully, and preventing the bully.^{10,11} Some studies have shown that seeking social support is a coping method.¹² Although some students have reported cyberbullying incidents to their friends or parents¹³, it has been argued that cyberbullying victims are less likely to seek help than traditional

bullying victims.¹⁴ It was stated that they also use coping methods within the scope of online security, such as changing their username/account ID, changing their e-mail address/phone number, unfriending/blocking messages, or using social media.¹⁵ In another study, it was determined that victims preferred to fight, especially for cyberbullying.¹⁶

As can be seen from the literature data, the coping mechanisms of young people vary. We believe that the fields of difficulty experienced by young people in their lives may affect their coping mechanisms. In this context, we planned our study on the basis of the hypothesis that the difficulties experienced by young people may affect their preferred coping methods in case of exposure to cyberbullying.

Adolescents may experience difficulties in some fields during certain periods of their lives. These difficulties they experience are sometimes not at the level of psychiatric diagnosis but are considered some problems in the ordinary course of adolescence. In our study, the fields where adolescents had problems were determined using the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and coping strategies (seeking social support, seeking help, struggling, online security) for cyberbullying were determined using the Scale on Coping with Cyber Bullying (SCCB). It is planned to examine the effect of adolescents on preferring coping mechanisms with cyberbullying in case these identified fields (hyperactivity/inattention problems, conduct problems, emotional problems, peer problems, and prosocial behavior) are exposed to cyberbullying. The results we obtained will shed light on future studies by providing a new perspective on the approach strategies to be applied in the clinical approach to the cyberbullying victimization of adolescents.

Material and Method

This study included 161 adolescents attending Pamukkale University, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Outpatient Clinics for any reason and continuing their high school education between October and November 2021. Participants and their parents/legal guardians completed a consent form stating that they agreed to participate in the study. All participants were asked to fill out the Sociodemographic data form (SDF), SCCB, and SDQ. The study did not include patients with psychiatric conditions who could not fill out the forms, such as individuals in the attack period of bipolar disorder, mental retardation, psychotic disorder, and autism spectrum disorder. The clinical diagnoses of the patients were evaluated using Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-V-based interviews. The ethics committee approval of the study was obtained from Pamukkale University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee dated 05.10.2021 and numbered 18. We performed all study procedures following the Declaration of Helsinki.

Sociodemographic Data Form

The researchers created a SDF. It includes information about gender, age, educational status, time spent on the internet and social media, and social media platforms used by the adolescent.

Scale for Coping with Cyber Bullying

Peker et al.¹⁷ created this scale. The scale consists of 17 questions on a 4-point Likert scale (1-never, 2-sometimes, 3-usually, 4-always). The scale examines adolescents’ coping methods with cyberbullying in 4 subscales. These subscales areas follows: seeking social support, seeking help (questions in this content include seeking help from an adult, family member, or teacher), struggling, and online security. As the score for these subscale increases, the adolescent uses that subscale more.¹⁷

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Adolescent Form)

Goodman developed the questionnaire¹⁸ and Güvenir et al.¹⁹ adapted it into Turkish in 2008. The questionnaire has an adolescent form filled out by adolescents aged 11-16 years. There are 25 questions in the SDQ that question positive and negative behavioral characteristics. The dimensions evaluated by the questionnaire were hyperactivity/inattention problems, conduct problems, emotional problems, peer problems, and prosocial behavior. The answers given to the questionnaire range from 0-not true to 2-certainly true. Each dimension could be evaluated within itself, and a total score could be obtained from the sum of the first four dimensions.

Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 25.0 [IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.)]. Continuous variables were defined by the mean ± standard deviation and minimum-maximum values. In addition, categorical variables were defined by frequencies and percentage. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship and effects of continuous variables. In the univariate analysis, all parameters with a p value of <0.05 were added to the multivariate model. Statistical significance was determined as p<0.05.

Results

One hundred sixty-one adolescents were included in the study. Of the participants, 98 were girls (60.9%) and 63 were boys (39.1%). The mean age of the participants was 15.6±1.1 (range 13-17 years). The daily internet use of the participants and the time spent on social media are shown in Table 1.

The participants’ scores from the SCCB and SDQ are shown in Table 2.

The regression analysis results performed to investigate the factors affecting the SCCB subscales are shown in Table 3. The increase in the hyperactivity/inattention score was found to

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

		n	%
Gender	Female	98	60.9
	Male	63	39.1
Daily internet usage	0-1 hours	10	6.2
	1-3 hours	52	32.3
	3-6 hours	51	31.7
	More than 6 h	48	29.8
Time spent on social media	0-1 hours	30	18.6
	1-3 hours	62	38.5
	3-6 hours	36	22.4
	More than 6 h	33	20.5

Table 2. Scores of the participants from the SCCB and SDQ

		Mean ± SD	Minimum-maximum
SCCB	Seeking social support	7.9±2.4	3-12
	Seeking help	11.2±4.2	5-20
	Struggling	11.4±3.3	4-14
	Online security	16.6±3.3	5-20
SDQ	Hyperactivity/inattention	5.9±6.0	1-10
	Emotional problems	4.7±2.7	0-10
	Conduct problems	2.9±1.5	0-8
	Peer problems	5.1±1.6	1-9
	Prosocial behaviour	6.5±2.0	1-9
	Total	18.8±4.9	5-33

SCCB: Scale on Coping with Cyber Bullying, SDQ: Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire, SD: Standard deviation

increase the scores of seeking social support, seeking help, and online security. The increase in the scores on the prosocial scale had an increasing effect on the scores in seeking social support, seeking help, struggling, and online security. It was found that

being male had a lower effect on seeking social support and struggling scores. Increasing conduct problem scale scores had a lowering effect on online security scores.

Table 3. Factors affecting the subscales of the SCCB

	Risk factors	Univariate				Multivariate			
		STD. Beta	t	p-value	%95 CI	STD. Beta	t	p-value	%95 CI
Social support seeking	Hyperactivity/inattention	0.273	3.578	0.0001*	0.173- 0.598	0.218	2.955	0.004*	0.102- 0.514
	Emotional problems	0.094	1.188	0.237	-0.056- 0.224	-	-	-	-
	Conduct problems	-0.075	-0.946	0.345	-0.348- 0.123	-	-	-	-
	Peer problems	0.063	0.792	0.429	-0.139- 0.326	-	-	-	-
	Prosocial behaviour	0.349	4.702	0.0001*	0.236- 0.578	0.284	3.83	0.0001*	0.16- 0.501
	Total score SDQ	0.141	1.801	0.074	-0.007- 0.144	-	-	-	-
	Age	0.123	1.56	0.121	-0.072- 0.614	-	-	-	-
	Education status	0.136	1.734	0.085	-0.044- 0.673	-	-	-	-
	Gender	-0.187	-2.398	0.018	-1.695-0.164	-0.163	-2.248	0.026*	-1.523-0.098
Seeking help	Hyperactivity/inattention	0.298	3.942	0.0001*	0.36-1.084	0.216	2.884	0.004*	0.165- 0.882
	Emotional problems	0.038	0.484	0.629	-0.181- 0.299	-	-	-	-
	Conduct problems	-0.047	-0.598	0.551	-0.527- 0.282	-	-	-	-
	Peer problems	0.186	2.382	0.018	0.081- 0.866	0.101	1.372	0.172	-0.114- 0.631
	Prosocial behaviour	0.361	4.882	0.0001*	0.429- 1.012	0.293	3.926	0.0001*	0.29- 0.878
	Total score SDQ	0.169	2.163	0.032	0.012- 0.27	-	-	-	-
	Age	0.123	1.56	0.121	-0.072- 0.614	-	-	-	-
	Education status	0.136	1.734	0.085	-0.044- 0.673	-	-	-	-
	Gender	-0.187	-2.398	0.018	-1.695- -0.164	-0.069	-0.947	0.345	-1.807- 0.636
Struggling	Hyperactivity/inattention	0.188	2.409	0.017	0.065- 0.657	0.135	1.758	0.081	-0.032- 0.55
	Emotional problems	0.206	2.651	0.009	0.064- 0.438	0.044	0.525	0.6	-0.147- 0.253
	Conduct Problems	-0.053	-0.666	0.506	-0.429- 0.213	-	-	-	-
	Peer problems	0.124	1.574	0.117	-0.064- 0.566	-	-	-	-
	Prosocial behaviour	0.308	4.078	0.0001*	0.252- 0.724	0.246	3.298	0.001*	0.156- 0.624
	Total score SDQ	0.2	2.574	0.011	0.031- 0.234	-	-	-	-
	Age	0.123	1.56	0.121	-0.072- 0.614	-	-	-	-
	Education status	0.136	1.734	0.085	-0.044- 0.673	-	-	-	-
	Gender	-0.187	-2.398	0.018	-1.695-0.164	-0.254	-3.103	0.002*	-2.814-0.625
Online security	Hyperactivity/inattention	0.243	3.162	0.002	0.177- 0.767	0.227	2.948	0.004*	0.145- 0.735
	Emotional problems	0.166	2.125	0.035	0.014- 0.394	0.109	1.274	0.205	-0.074- 0.341
	Conduct problems	-0.176	-2.259	0.025	-0.685-0.046	-0.249	-3.266	0.001*	-0.828-0.204
	Peer problems	0.105	1.337	0.183	-0.103- 0.534	-	-	-	-
	Prosocial behaviour	0.29	3.821	0.0001*	0.224- 0.704	0.198	2.646	0.009*	0.08- 0.552
	Total score SDQ	0.152	1.935	0.055	-0.002- 0.205	-	-	-	-
	Age	0.123	1.56	0.121	-0.072- 0.614	-	-	-	-
	Education status	0.136	1.734	0.085	-0.044- 0.673	-	-	-	-
	Gender	-0.187	-2.398	0.018	-1.695-0.164	-0.147	-1.811	0.072	-2.103- 0.091

*p<0.05 statistically significant; STD. Beta: Standardized beta coefficient, CI: Confidence interval lower and upper bounds, SCCB: Scale on Coping with Cyber Bullying, SDQ: Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

Discussion

In this study, the coping methods that adolescents could use when exposed to cyberbullying were determined using a scale. The preference of these methods and their relationship with the subscales obtained from the SDQ were examined. According to the results, the increase in the hyperactivity/inattention score from the SDQ scale has an increasing effect on the scores of seeking social support, seeking help, and online security. The increase in the score of prosociality has an increasing effect on the scores of seeking social support, seeking help, struggling, and online security. It was determined that being male had a lower effect on seeking social support and struggling scores. In addition, it has been revealed that an increase in conduct problem scale scores has a lowering effect on online security scores.

Many studies have shown that children and adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience more bullying or being a victim of bullying than their peers.^{20,21} Holmberg and Hjern²² found that the rate of bullying in children with ADHD is ten times higher, and the victimization rate is three times higher than that in the control group. Sourander et al.² stated that the relationship between hyperactivity symptoms and cyberbullying crime was revealed. Perceived social support: this is defined as the perception that a person is cared for and valued by his/her family, peers, and teachers. It is emphasized that this situation plays a protective role in peer victimization.²³ A study indicated that children and adolescents with ADHD tend to have low levels of perceived social support.²⁴ In another study, students with ADHD consulted an adult (parent, teacher) more often when they were cyber victims than when they were cyber victims in the non-ADHD group.²⁵ There are different views on social support-seeking and help-seeking behaviors in the literature. The results of our study support that high hyperactivity/inattention scores have an increasing effect on the frequency of social support-seeking and help-seeking behaviors. On the other hand, an increase in hyperactivity/inattention scores has an increasing effect on the frequency of online security behavior. In this context, no study has been found in the literature.

An increase in the score of prosociality; has an increasing effect on the scores of seeking social support, seeking help, struggling, and online security. Prosocial behavior is defined as voluntary behavior aimed at benefiting others and includes a broad and multidimensional behavior area such as altruistic helping, sharing, and cooperation.²⁶ This behavior pattern also refers to interpersonal helping behavior and cooperation that benefits the individual's group.²⁷ Experiences of gratitude toward others when supported lead to positive social behaviors when the person receiving support also helps others.²⁸ It has been shown that students who receive a more social support from their teachers and classmates are more likely to display sharing and collaborative behaviors²⁹. While having a low level of prosocial behavior is a risk factor for bullying and victimization³⁰, an increase in prosocial behavior was found to prevent being a bully/victim.³¹ Based on all these literature data, exhibiting more

prosocial behaviors, where the desire to help the environment is intense, makes it possible to prefer all kinds of support and coping mechanisms if exposed to bullying.

In this study, being male had a lower effect on seeking social support and struggling scores. It has been shown that men are more likely to be bullies and cyberbullies than women.¹⁴ According to Furman³², perceived social support levels vary according to gender. In a study, when students' perceived social support levels were examined in terms of gender, female students' perceived social support levels were higher than male students.³³ In many studies, women's perceived social support level was higher than that of.^{34,35} The most consistent gender gap in coping strategies was women's willingness to seek social support.³⁶ Our finding that male gender has a lowering effect on the social support-seeking score is compatible with the literature. Men prefer to struggle more with traditional bullying³⁷ and cyberbullying.¹⁶ The result of our study, which was the reducing effect of being a male on struggling behavior, is different from the literature. Our sample was a clinical sample, and the presence of accompanying psychiatric diagnoses may have been influential in this result.

The increase in conduct problem scores had a lowering effect on online security scores. In SCCB, there are online security behaviors such as "not opening messages from people you do not know", "not sharing your account passwords with others", "putting hard-to-guess passwords on personal accounts", "using sites you think are safe", and "staying away from websites you do not know". Ybarra and Mitchell³⁸ found that young people who engage in cyberbullying are more prone to conduct problems such as aggression and non-compliance with rules. Considering that young people who engage in cyberbullying have behavioral problems and difficulties obeying the rules, it could be thought that the increase in the behavioral problem scores in our study leads to less preference for online security behaviors, which is a finding that supports the literature.

Study Limitations

There were some limitations in this study. The first limitation was that this study was conducted in a clinical sample. It is difficult to generalize our findings to all adolescents. The second limitation was that only the scales for adolescents were applied, and the scale for parents was not given. Therefore, it was not possible to compare the information received from the parent with the information obtained from the young person himself.

Conclusion

We believe that identifying the fields where young people have problems and knowing their effects on coping strategies in case of exposure to cyberbullying will be important in planning clinical approaches to be applied to young people exposed to cyberbullying. Supporting the mechanisms that young people use less often and strengthening the mechanisms they use frequently will prevent the occurrence of possible accompanying psychiatric comorbidities.

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Ethics

Ethics Committee Approval: The ethics committee approval of the study was obtained from Pamukkale University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee dated 05.10.2021 and numbered 18.

Informed Consent: Participants and their parents/legal guardians completed a consent form stating that they agreed to participate in the study.

Authorship Contributions

Concept: E.G.G., A.B., Design: E.G.G., A.B., Data Collection or Processing: E.G.G., A.B., H.Ş., Analysis or Interpretation: E.G.G., A.B., H.Ş., Literature Search: E.G.G., A.B., Writing: E.G.G.

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