

The relationship between cyberbullying and peer support on adolescent body image: A cross sectional study

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Introduction

- Body image is an issue of concern for adolescents in Ireland
- Cross sectional studies revealed that:
 - 81% of girls & 55% of boys aged 12-18 reported a desire to alter their body shape (Lawler & Nixon, 2011)
 - 13% of non- overweight children aged 10-17 reported that they were on a diet in 2010 (Kelly, Molcho & Nic Gabhainn, 2010); which increased to 16% in 2014 (Gavin, Keane, Callaghan, Molcho, Kelly & Nic Gabhainn, 2014)
- The prevalence of body image concerns → may lead to the negative health outcomes
- Societal impacts have been identified as having an impact on the way in which adolescents view and act towards their body image
- Tripartite Model of Body Image and Eating Disturbance → Parents, Peers & Media

Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying refers to threatening or harassing another via modern information and communication technologies
- Approximately 20-40% of adolescents report cyber victimisation (Frisén, Berne & Lunde, 2014)
- Two quantitative studies examining cyberbullying and body image found that:
 - Appearance is the most commonly reported reason for being cyberbullied
 - Appearance cyber-victimisation is associated with lower body-esteem, feelings of depression (Frisén, Berne & Lunde, 2014) and suicidal ideation (DeSmet, Deforche, Hublet, Tanghe, Stremersch & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2014)

Peer support

- Research concerning body image and peer support is also limited
- Few studies conducted to date show that:
 - Social engagement with peers has a positive impact on body image amongst overweight/obese adolescent girls (Caccavale, Farhat & Iannotti, 2012)
 - Low friendship quality contributes to body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls (Schutz & Paxton, 2007; Gerner & Wilson, 2005)

Research Question

To what extent does cyber-bullying and peer support impact body image perception among adolescents in Ireland?

Methods

Sample

- Data from the Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study 2013/14 were used for the current study
- The HBSC study is a WHO-collaborative cross-sectional survey, conducted every four years
- 7,320 school-aged children (40 % male; 60% female) between the ages of 13 to 17 years old took part in this study

Procedure

- Self-completion questionnaires were administered by teachers, in the classroom ~ 40 minutes to complete.

Analysis

- SPSS, Version 22 - Logistic Regression analyses

Methods : *Measures*

1. Body image

Do you think your body is...? ‘much too thin’, ‘a bit too thin’, ‘about the right size’, ‘a bit too fat’, or ‘much too fat’

Participants’ responses were recoded into ‘too thin’ ‘the right size’ and ‘too fat’

2. Cyberbullying

How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months in the ways listed below: (i) Someone sent mean instant messages, wall postings, emails and text messages, or created a Web site that made fun of me; (ii) Someone took unflattering or inappropriate pictures of me without permission and posted them online

For both items, response options included: ‘I have not been bullied in this way in the past couple of months’; ‘Only once or twice’; ‘2 or 3 times a month’; ‘About once a week’; and ‘Several times a week’

Responses were dichotomised into “yes” and “no” for each item

Measures continued

3. Peer support: Multidimensional Scale of Peer support

Participants were asked to rate the following statements: ‘My friends really try to help me’; ‘I can count on my friends when things go wrong’; ‘I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows’; ‘I can talk about my problems with my friends’, on a scale from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*)

A variable was computed to calculate a mean friendship dynamics score for all participants who answered the four items within the above scale. Following this, the peer support item was dichotomised into weak (1 to 4.49) and strong peer support (4.50 to 7)

Breakdown of participant's descriptive characteristics by gender

Descriptive Characteristic	% (n)		
	Total (n=7320)	Boys (n=2960)	Girls (n=4336)
Body Dissatisfaction			
Too thin	11.7 (855)	18.7 (553)	6.9 (299)
Right size	52.2 (3820)	58.8 (1740)	47.7 (2069)
Too fat	33.9 (2482)	20.5 (607)	43.1 (1867)
Missing	2.2 (163)	2.0 (60)	2.3 (101)
Cyberbullied			
No	71.1 (5207)	78.2 (2315)	66.4 (2878)
Yes	25.5 (1866)	17.4 (514)	31.0 (1345)
Missing	3.4 (247)	4.4 (131)	2.6 (113)
Friendship Dynamics			
Weak	28.6 (2094)	32.6 (965)	25.9 (1123)
Strong	59.1 (4326)	51.0 (1510)	64.6 (2801)
Missing	12.3 (900)	16.4 (485)	9.5 (412)

Logistic regression analyses for participants who are dissatisfied with their body

Predictor	Too thin		Too fat	
	OR	p	OR	p
Gender				
Boys	1.00		1.00	
Girls	-0.32	0.000**	2.73	0.000**
Cyberbullying				
No	1.00		1.00	
Yes	1.10	0.323	1.79	0.000**
Friendship Dynamics				
Weak	1.00		1.00	
Strong	0.89	0.182	-0.79	0.000**

p<0.05. **p<0.001.

Limitations & Strengths

- The cross-sectional study design of this study does not allow us to draw any conclusions about causal relationships
- Another limitation of this study is that it relied on self-report for all variables; however, students' were ensured complete anonymity and therefore, had no reason to misreport their responses
- The main strength of this article is that, to our knowledge, it is one of the first studies to examine the relationship between peer support and body image in an Irish context
- Other strengths of this study include the large and nationally representative sample of adolescents and the use of standardised and validated research methods

Conclusions

- In line with previous studies, the results of this study showed that girls are more likely to report that their body is too fat, compared to boys; while boys are more likely to report that their body is too thin
- Our study also found that:
 - More girls than boys report being cyberbullied
 - Adolescents who report being cyberbullied are approximately twice as likely to perceive themselves as too fat, compared to adolescents who do not report being cyberbullied
 - Girls report higher levels of peer support than boys
 - Adolescents who report high peer support are less likely to perceive themselves as too fat, compared to adolescents who reported low peer support

Future Directions



- Results of this study should be used to gain a better understanding of factors that contribute to adolescent body dissatisfaction
- From a health promotion perspective, interventions that encourage a more realistic attitude toward body image among adolescents should be developed and implemented
- Since body dissatisfaction and cyber-bullying are prevalent among adolescents, future research should examine the causal relationship of these variables

Thanks for listening

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