

# Cyber Bullying and Self-Disclosure: The predicting role of Cyber Bullying

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## ABSTRACT

The research aims to examine the relationship between cyber bullying and self-disclosure. Participants of the study were 480 high school students who answered the scales. According to the results, the dimensions of cyber bullying; verbal cyber-aggression and exclusion, impersonation and visual-sexual cyber-aggression are negatively related to self-disclosure. Stepwise multiple regression analysis results showed that dimensions of cyber bullying affected self-disclosure and verbal cyber-aggression and exclusion was a strong predictor of self-disclosure. The findings of the research were discussed within the framework of literature. *Metin girmek için burayı tıklayın.*

**Keywords:** *Cyber bullying, self-disclosure, regression analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Bullying behavior, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, was used as a basis for the study of bullying behavior at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. The interaction between these environments was affected by the demographic and family structure of adolescents. Olweus defines bullying as "violence or pressure" that is mentally and / or physically repetitive. Olweus also states that bullying occurs when one or more people are constantly exposed to negative actions, making it difficult for the victim to defend himself due to an imbalance of power (Olweus 1995). Arıca (2011) defines cyberbullying as all kinds of technical or relational harming behaviors against an individual or group, a private or a legal person, using information and communication technologies. In some ways, there are similarities such as cyber bullying and traditional bullying; threatening, mocking and humiliating. In addition to this situation, since virtual bullying does not require physical strength that people who do not normally engage in physically aggressive behavior can gain power and control over others. Rapid changes and developments in the field of science and technology make people's lives easier, but besides this convenience, it also brings some negative situations. Especially young people who follow technology closely perceive technology as a part of their lives and technology has become increasingly important in the lives of young people in recent years. Thanks to this technology, young people can make friends, maintain social relationships in virtual environments, express their feelings and thoughts easily, and share their own videos and photos (Eroğlu & Peker, 2011). Most adolescents today have regular access to online media through home, school and even libraries. Online environments are an important part of adolescents' education in terms of socialization. Adolescents' interests in online environments are quite different. Some adolescents have solid knowledge and skills to enable them to make good online behavior decisions; others are more naive and vulnerable; they may lack social skills and flexibility to deal with inappropriate encounters (McGrath, 2009). Adolescents with mental health problems or disabilities are often vulnerable online. Young people who are defined as "high risk" in the offline world due to abuse or negligence are also defined as high risk in online environments. Adolescents with this

condition are often socially isolated and have poor relationships with parents or other family members. The online experience of adolescents is holistic. They use this environment to communicate, socialize, learn, research, complete homework and play online games. Their offline and online environments tend to create difficulties for some young people in separating these worlds. Because of this holistic approach, teens share a lot of information about themselves online. Developments in information and communication technology becoming an important part of especially young people's lives; students began to show their bullying behaviors in schools in a virtual environment using electronic tools and the internet (Yaman, Eroğlu, & Peker, 2011). The negative effects of cyberbullying are among the emotional and physical effects that affect students' performance and behavior at school. The increasing use of technology in schools in recent years has become an important part of using technology in exposing students to different educational opportunities. As schools focus on increasing learning opportunities for students, the difficulties of maintaining a safe and organized environment with the increasing use of technology in communicating with each other are emerging. In many cases, the impact of cyberbullies on victims in the school environment can be traumatic and prolonged. Due to the proliferation of social media organizations in recent years and the tendency of the society to use smartphones, cyberbullying is now a part of the school agenda. Research on bullying tends to focus on the behavior of victims, bullies, and peers, and the effects of these experiences. Cyberbullying is becoming the new communication problem of our developing technology. With the positive side of communication that can be easily established with all parts of the world in the developing new technology. This communication network has serious consequences that can cause people to be subjected to psychological pressure and to be abused, to experience mental distress and to commit suicide (Sarı, 2014). Over the past decade, the presence of a large number of popular online social media platforms has raised privacy concerns and prompted public discussion of online disclosure on these websites. Changes in the availability of privacy measures have been directly linked to growing concerns about online disclosure risks. As online platforms become more popular, problems arise. Information can be used in unwanted situations, such as cyberbullying. Information and photos on the social media platform can also have a negative impact on the user's reputation. Moreover; cyberbullying incidents can weaken the school climate and make students feel insecure.

### ***Self-Disclosure***

Self-disclosure is defined as the process of explaining one's feelings and thoughts about himself to others. It is now extensively studied by social and clinical psychologists interested in self-disclosure, interpersonal communication, and close relationships. Questions about people's reasons for self-disclosure have led to significant research and theory production over the years. Although situational factors have an important effect on communication patterns in close relationships, individual differences can be observed even in the face of strong social-situational stimuli (Derlega & Berg, 1987). Jourard found that self-disclosure as a healthy personality and sign. Self-disclosure is a relatively stable personality trait associated with positive personality traits (Jourard, 1958). Early self-explanatory researchers focused on the possibility that the tendency towards explanation may have a stable personality trait that can be measured through a self-report tool. Self-disclosure plays a central role in people's personal lives. Self-disclosure can be in a variety of interactions or contexts, such as different relationship settings, romantic partners, client and online, such as a therapist (Nguyen, Bin, & Campbell, 2012). The disclosed personal information may include basic explicit information such as demography (age, gender, height) as well as more confidential information such as attitudes and opinions, values, beliefs, emotions, needs, fantasies, and fears. The information disclosed may vary according to importance; the amount of information, the time spent on communication, and the variety and depth of topics - some explanation issues may be more hidden and related to the internal situation than others (Li, 2007). For example, explanations about personal feelings, desires, thoughts, fantasies, and values are considered to be deeper, more internal, than statements about mere facts. Many social interactions and relationships occur partially or completely online in the 21st century. Many online platforms available for disclosure of personal information, the high use of these platforms enables more people to be online (Li, 2007). Online self-disclosure does not appear to have different features compared to offline self-disclosure, basically it differs in the structural characteristics of the message environment (Rains & Karmikel, 2008). These contextual differences can shape perceptions and responses that give different relational results in a certain way, including relational processes (Adams et al.,

2004). A new relationship in everyday life usually begins with an exchange of personal information. In relationships, the individual's self-disclosure provides trustworthiness and development of the relationship. If a relationship is thought to be beneficial, the individual's self-disclosure increases. The process of self-disclosure plays an important role in moving relationships from superficial to intimate. Individuals aiming to establish long-term and important relationships exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure behavior. The process of self-disclosure deals with relationship ambiguity in two ways. First, the higher the level of self-disclosure in relationships, the less uncertainty in the relevant relationship; conversely, the stronger the uncertainty in a relationship, the lower the level of self-disclosure between the parties. In addition, self-disclosure reduces mutual uncertainty about thoughts and beliefs, and this process significantly encourages the development of the relationship (Almakrami, 2015).

West and Turner (2010) defined self-disclosure as the process of giving information about yourself to others purposefully while revealing pieces of information about another person. In the relationship process, when one opens to the other, this process shows that the recipient is loved and reliable (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). Self-disclosure is seen as an indicator of the level of sincerity of expression and the level of trust and love in bilateral relations. Relationships can also include an intimate quality of self-disclosure. The recipient feels socially rewarded and feels the love of the open individual as a result. In addition, intimacy in the process of self-disclosure is defined as a deep level of communication where the sender reveals personal information about them. It includes the number of topics discussed in the self-disclosure relationship process and the common areas of how much time they spend dealing with these issues. It refers to the degree of sincerity that guides in-depth topic discussion in the process of self-disclosure (West and Turner, 2010). Adler and Towne (1996) state that self-disclosure can move towards deep personal information rather than superficial communication. This process is expressed in terms of clichés, facts, opinions and feelings. Clichés are polite short reactions to strangers or new situations. It is also described as a reaction to ritualized, social situations. Views include how and what a person thinks about a particular topic. Emotions are usually expressed as the most obvious. This process goes down to the depth of how the individual's views on the subject recognize for themselves that the principle or issue is correct. Self-disclosure is rewarding and provides significant benefits for individuals, but also involves risks, especially in social media environments. Today, self-disclosure on social media platforms has become an important part of one's social life. Social media technologies greatly facilitate such sharing of personal information to a large audience through indirect status updates. Self-disclosure in the social media creates challenges such as reflecting different content, increased vulnerability, and loss of privacy (Ma, Hancock, & Naaman, 2016). The objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between cyber bullying and self-disclosure. Another purpose of the study is to find out if cyber bullying predicts self-disclosure. It is also supposed to support the future research by explaining the relationships between subscale of cyber bullying –verbal cyber-aggression, impersonation and visual-sexual cyber-aggression and self-disclosure processes.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Research sample consists of high school students. The sample group consists of 480 students, 271 (%56) of which are female and 209 (%44) of which are male. The students who were selected randomly are in different high schools located in the central districts of Bursa, Sakarya and İstanbul. Ages ranged from 14 to 19 years (standard deviation of age = 1.25, mean=16.3).

### *Instruments*

#### Self-Disclosure Scale

Self-Disclosure Scale was developed by Kahn and Hessling (2001). Turkish form of the scale was applied to 333 high school students. Reliability was examined with item analysis corrected item-total score correlation and confirmatory factor analysis. In the confirmatory factor analysis for the scale, it was seen that the one-dimensional model fit well ( $\chi^2 = 116.05$ ,  $sd = 50$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $RMSEA = .063$ ,  $NFI = .97$ ,  $NNFI = .97$ ,

CFI = .98, IFI = .98 , RFI = .95, GFI = .94, and SRMR = .45). The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .86. As a result of the analysis, it was concluded that the Turkish Form of the Self-Disclosure Scale was valid and reliable in the sample group in which it was applied (Arslan, 2017). The reliability coefficient of the scale (Cronbach alpha ) .65.

Cyber Bullying Scale

Cyberbullying scale for adolescents was developed by Álvarez-García, Barreiro-Collazo, Núñez, and Dobarro (2016). Reliability was examined with item analysis corrected item-total score correlation and confirmatory factor analysis. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was found as .89. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis of the scale, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy was found .92. Explanation of the total variance of the three-factor structure of the scale was found to be 57%. In the confirmatory factor analysis for the scale, it was seen that the three-dimensional model fit well ( $\chi^2 = 600.31$ ,  $sd = 87$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $RMSEA = .085$ ,  $NFI = .95$ ,  $NNFI = .95$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $IFI = .96$  ,  $RFI = .94$ ,  $GFI = .91$ , and  $SRMR = .30$ ).

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows statistical values and relationships of variables and the reliability of the relationships between variables. The result of correlation analysis in Table 1, dimensions of Cyber Bullying; Verbal cyber-aggression ( $r = -.229$ ;  $**p < .01$ ), Impersonation ( $r = -.226$ ;  $**p < .01$ ) and Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression ( $r = -.212$ ;  $**p < .01$ ) related negatively to self disclosure.

Table 1  
Statistical Values and Relationships of variables

Variables	Verbal cyber-aggression	Impersonation	Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression	Self disclosure
Verbal cyber-aggression	1			
Impersonation	.569**	1		
Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression	.572**	.596**	1	
Self disclosure	-.229**	-.226**	-.212**	1
Mean	11.8	3.2	3.3	37.0
SD	3.1	0.7	0.9	4.5

\*\* $p < .01$

Multiple Regression Analysis

Analysis was carried out to detect which factors of cyber bullying the best predictors of were self disclosure. Table 2 displayed the results of analysis.

Table 2  
Regression Results for Variables

Variables	B	Standard Error of B	$\beta$	t
Step 1				
Verbal cyber-aggression	-.331	.06	-.229	-5.028*
Step 2				
Verbal cyber-aggression	-.214	.080	-.148	-2.692*
Impersonation	-.875	.339	-.142	-2.581*
Step 3				
Verbal cyber-aggression	-.170	.086	-.118	-1.990*
Impersonation	-.700	.361	-.114	-1.937*
Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression	-.379	.275	-.081	-1.378

$p^* < .05$

According to the results analysis, verbal cyber-aggression calculating for 5 % of the variance in predicting self disclosure ( $R=.229$ , adjusted  $R^2=.052$ ). Impersonation entered the second step calculating for an 1% ( $R=.257$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.066$ ). Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression, calculating for an 1 % variance ( $R=.264$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.070$ ). The last models contain Verbal cyber-aggression, Impersonation and Visual-Sexual cyber-aggression as accounted for 7% of the variance. Coefficients showed all factors significantly influencing self disclosure and Verbal cyber-aggression as the strongest predictor.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to detect the relationship between cyber bullying and self-disclosure. Findings showed that cyber bullying was negatively related to self-disclosure. They also showed that cyber bullying was an important determinant of self-disclosure. The study aimed to determine the relationship between the cyber bullying and self-disclosure levels of the high school students. It was seen that there was no study on the relationship between cyber bullying and self-disclosure. It was understood that self-disclosure was negatively correlated with verbal cyber-aggression calculating, impersonation and visual-sexual cyber-aggression. As a result of the research, there was a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying and self-disclosure levels of adolescents. There was also a significant negative correlation between adolescents' cyberbullying subscale scores and self-disclosure levels. This result showed that adolescents didn't engage in self-disclosure behavior in their daily life in a healthy way. A new relationship in everyday life usually begins with an exchange of personal information. In relationships, the individual's self-disclosure provides trustworthiness and the development of the relationship. If a relationship is thought to be beneficial, the individual's self-disclosure increases. The process of self-disclosure plays an important role in moving relationships from superficial to intimate. Individuals aiming to establish long-term and important relationships exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure behavior. The process of self-disclosure deals with relationship ambiguity in two ways. First, the higher the level of self-disclosure in relationships, the less uncertainty in the relationship; conversely, the stronger the uncertainty in a relationship, the lower the level of self-disclosure between the parties. In addition, self-disclosure reduces mutual uncertainty about thoughts and beliefs, and this process significantly encourages the development of the relationship (Almakrami, 2015). In Davis (2012) online self-disclosure research on adolescents, nearly half of the participants think it is easier to share personal feelings online. Also, participants noted that online explanations were easier due to the reduction of non-verbal cues and a feeling of controlling a person's communication. Girls are more likely to make self-disclosures online than boys. The intimate postings and statements made by adolescents online reflect a defining feature of their adolescent friendship, which plays an important role in helping adolescents give and receive feedback about their identity. Tang and Wang (2011) stated in their study that adolescents engage in self-disclosure behaviors in online environments within the scope of attitude, body, money, job, emotions, personal, interests, and experiences. Researchers found that those participating in the blog research were aware of the wide-ranging risks of disclosure and were more willing to disclose their own interests and experiences rather than personal and monetary issues. Among their motivation to do the self-disclosure behavior on adolescents; self-esteem, trust, popularity. Also, it has been determined that users' privacy concerns and trust tendencies are important factors in whether individuals are willing to disclose personal information (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2011). Adolescents are generally aware of the possible consequences of their self-disclosure behaviors, but often do not act (significantly) on this information. Their privacy settings were changed after the incident when their privacy was disclosed. It noted that the experiences of online self-disclosure are not limited to unintentional explanations, but also include "bullying, unwanted communication, and misunderstandings (Debatin, 2009). Online self-disclosure can involve non-verbal communication, including self-submitted pictures, which can be a conscious mechanism for self-disclosure. This does not apply to face-to-face communication where there are fewer opportunities to change views. However, in online settings, the physical appearance of a person may or may not be shared, depending on an individual's intention. Self-disclosure is a key factor in developing relationships in online environments, as well as in face-to-face contexts. Computer mediated environments such as social networking sites and online dating sites offer us various opportunities to initiate, develop and maintain interpersonal relationships (Kim and Dindia, 2011). The study includes suggestions for future studies too.



Research has been carried with high school students aged between 14 to 19 . These schools are in the central districts and same type of high schools which approves students according to their exam scores. Further studies may cover universtiy students . In order to expand the results of this research, investigating in varied fields with different samples for the further research is suggested. Longitudinal research design is needed to evaluate causality problems.

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