The profiles of the Victim & Aggressor of cyberbullying

The TECPC project's research done to set up the profiles of the Victim – Aggressor of cyberbullying has included studies on cyberbullying, statistics, support strategies, selection of cases of cyberbullying, best practice actions, interviews and collections of data and national reports on the topic as well as the results of the TECPC questionnaires applied to students, parents, teachers and school counsellors from the partner countries (Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania).

Our research has highlighted several factors having the potential to influence children to get involved in cyberbullying. *These factors are common traits in the profiles of all children involved in the phenomenon.* They are closely linked to *children's emerging use of technologies*. Children are increasingly computer literate, have access and exposure to the screen (from increasingly younger ages), have a smartphone or a tablet. There are also *external factors* (peer pressure, having older siblings, school and family environment, residence, in a city or a village, and other issues such as school transitions), which contribute to the phenomenon.

Research has shown that the ability to use a computer and literacy are important. Once they get the necessary digital skills, young children access the internet and may become targets through 'naive' use of the internet as they lack the knowledge about what is possible on the internet and how to protect themselves.

Children's access to ICT and the amount of daily screen use has become more widespread and at increasingly younger ages, meaning that children are at risk of being involved in cyberbullying at younger ages. The youngest age mentioned was five years old.

The external factors revealed by research focus on the influences of peer pressure to have a mobile phone or to be using particular modes/platforms of communication online, the school environment, the role of older siblings in passing down mobile phones with internet access to younger and in modelling the use of ICT, children' s need to use social networking sites when they move to different secondary schools as a way of keeping in touch with old friends, which may result in an increase in the use of ICT.

Research has shown that the risk for involvement in cyberbullying (particularly as the perpetrator) is also correlated to the school environment: the school policy, atmosphere and relationships among classmates. Thus, the CYB-AGS (cyber-aggressor) score from the questionnaires is negatively correlated with children's satisfaction with their relationships with their friends; the more dissatisfied children are with these relationships, the more likely these children are to become cyber aggressors.

In addition, the risk for involvement in cyberbullying (particularly as the perpetrator) is linked to children's levels of supervision by adults, where the existing rules and procedures established within the family, the technology gap between children and adults, and home and school supervision play a crucial role. The results show that supportive and controlling parenting styles are negatively correlated with cyber aggression scores in the sense that the better the parents fit into these parenting styles, the lower the level of cyber aggression.

Moreover, children's relationships with their parents may lead to the phenomenon as a child who is usually bullied at home might be more at risk of cyberbullying others; children who behave aggressively towards their peers may come from homes where bullying-type behaviour is a norm. Cyberbullies may have poorer relationships with their parents. The findings of the TECPC questionnaire show that children who are very satisfied with their relationship with their parents have a lower score on cyber victimization compared to children who are very dissatisfied with their relationship with their parents. As for cyber-aggressors, there are significant differences on the cyber-aggressor (CYB-AGS) scale in terms of student satisfaction with their relationship with parents: children who are very dissatisfied with their relationship with their parents have a higher score on this scale compared to children who are very satisfied with their relationship with their parents.

Besides these, the relationship between parents, the frequency the children happen to be victims of cyberbullying, and family affluence positively correlate with the scores obtained on the Cyber victimisation (CYVIC) scale: the more conflicting the parents' relationship is, the more frequently children are terrorized online. The findings have also revealed a strong connection between the CYB-AGS score and the relationship between parents. Thus, children obtain a higher score on the CYB-AGS scale when the relationships between parents are toxic or, even worse, non-existent.
As for the family's affluence, the greater it is, the greater the aggression suffered by children through the Internet. In addition, the greater the family affluence is, the more likely children are to be cyber aggressors.

Also, the atmosphere and the quality of time spent in the family reduce the child's chances of becoming an aggressor. The comparative analysis shows that children with at least one parent working abroad, far from home, have a higher score on the CYB-AGS scale than children whose parents work in their home country.

The residence where the child lives may also be important: children living in the city have a lower score on cyber victimization (CYVIC) compared to children living in villages. Boys and children living in a city have lower scores on the CYB-AGS scale than girls and children living in a village.
Previous experiences as victims of cyberbullying may also lead to cyberbullying others. Thus, the results showed that the more often children happen to be cyberbullying victims, the higher the score on the CYB-AGS scale they get.

Cyberbullying is related to more frequent use of technology (computer skills, online time, the use of social networks sites, or communication technologies) as well as the above mentioned external factors. Teachers and parents should know their students and offspring very well, promote and support good and respectful relationships and create a friendly and open atmosphere in their environments based on trust.

Teachers and parents need to know about these factors, which are **common characteristics in profiles of all children** involved in the phenomenon:
-ability (literacy and computer literacy),
-access and exposure to the screen (amount of time spent)
-having a smartphone
-peer pressure
-having older siblings
-school transitions (move to another school; from primary to secondary)
-poor relationships with their parents
-tense & unwelcoming school environment (tense atmosphere, poor relationships with their friends, no friends, lack of school anti-cyberbullying policy/culture)

-tense & unwelcoming family environment (conflicting atmosphere, tense relationships and less quality time spent in the family)
-low levels of supervision by adults, lack of rules and procedures, feeble home and school supervision, and technology gap between children and adults.
-previous experiences as victims of cyberbullying
-residence (city or village)

Our research has shown that the higher the individual's computer skills are, the stronger their motivation to use and explore the network is. Children involved in cyberbullying tend to be heavy internet users. Excellent computer skills alone might not predict cyberbullying but they may play a role when there is *a problematic internet use* and *moral disengagement*.

The research analyzed the contribution of environmental and social factors (such as school climate, family supervision, rejection and isolation from peers, as well as individual factors such as self-esteem, self-control, empathy, competence, moral disengagement, impulsivity, social competence, previous experiences of bullying, and attitudes towards aggression) and also looked into the role played by children's cyber activities (such as cyber gossip or problematic internet use). Cyber activities may be a positive part of social learning because they add to group cohesion, inform the members of the group about certain issues or teach how to do a procedure, for instance. However, if associated with the problematic use of the internet, they can damage the environment since they negatively influence someone's reputation and this may even be used to do harm, as happens in cyberbullying.

To protect staff and children from harassment and abuse when technology is misused, schools should implement a solid school policy on online safety and digital literacy aiming at raising awareness of the existing digital threats and at the necessity of online safety skills. The knowledge and management of emotional experiences should also be part of the school strategy as they are crucial for balance and psychophysical well-being when dealing with the phenomenon.

We conclude that aspects such as the school environment, peer influence, family environment, and other factors related to cyberspace, personality, and attitudes towards aggression are all interrelated and should be considered when establishing and implementing an anti-cyberbullying school policy. They also require joint efforts of all actors involved: family, school and community.

Cyberbullying by age groups

Although cyberbullying could occur among primary school-aged pupils, research has indicated that it is more common during adolescence. Generally speaking, research has indicated the *highest participation rates occurring between 12-15 years of age* (although some research has found that cyberbullying victimization can continue to increase in late adolescence). In 2021, we found that cyberbullying *victimization tends to peak at around 14 and 15 years of age* before decreasing through the latter years of adolescence. With regard to *offending*, we again see concerning numbers with the youngest age group studied. Here, the highest percentage (6.2%) of youth who cyberbullied others were *13 years of age*.

Our research has revealed that cyberbullying and victimization:
- Begin typically in the *third grade* using electronic methods for social exclusion – leaving children out and knowingly hurting feelings;
- Increase between the ages of 11 and 15, which may be due to puberty, school changes, and/or development of social skills;

- Peak in 9th grade with the transition from middle to high school;
- Most common cyberbullying types at this age: the use of written name calling, insults, lies (fake information), revealing information about classmates without consent, gossip or posting unapproved pictures etc;
- Children aged 9 to 10 are more likely to be bullied on gaming websites, while teens ages 13 to 16 are more likely to be affected by cyberbullying on social media;
- Adolescents aged between 12 and 15 years have the highest risk for cybervictimization and this risk gradually declines beginning at age 16.

Trends in Cyberbullying by age groups

Ages 6-9: Most children are typically introduced to email and shared drives at school to promote collaboration and information exchange within the community. They are fascinated by the privacy of exchanging information in this new method. However, they might misuse the platforms while communicating and sharing information with classmates. They are not aware that the digital behaviors they engage in or start can have negative effects. They frequently reveal information or take part in activities that they wouldn't have done in face-to-face meetings.

Ages 10-12: Children this age have used technology for a long time at school and home and they are very good at it. Most of them have their own phones and tablets, and have social media accounts and access to a wide range of apps to interact with their peers, which can be used for gossip or posting unapproved pictures, etc.

Ages 13-15: This age group is especially susceptible to exclusion. They have an innate need to fit in with the group, and being left out—both physically and digitally—is their worst problem. This age group is also well-known for engaging in trickery, which involves convincing a peer to admit or say something before posting it online for all to see. They are also good at hacking into each other's phones and accounts, chatting and gossiping with each other online and publishing things under the victim's name.

Trends in Cyberbullying by gender groups

The vast majority of studies found no differences in terms of gender. However, some research discovered that girls were more likely than boys to become victims of cyberbullying. Older research claimed that girls used indirect forms of aggressiveness, such as spreading rumors or social exclusion, whereas guys tended to engage in direct forms of physical or verbal aggression. However, recent transcultural studies involving teenagers discovered that boys are more likely than girls to use indirect forms of aggressiveness. Girls tend to begin using social forms of bullying at earlier ages than boys and continue longer in the cyberbullying and victimization.

Children aged 12 +
- 23.7% of girls and 21.9% of boys between the ages of 13 and 17 report being cyberbullied
- Gender related to offending: 5.6% of boys, 4.5% of girls.
- Boys tend to externalize and engage in physically aggressive forms of cyberbullying, whereas girls tend to internalize and rely on verbal and social cyberaggression.
- Girls use social networking sites and mobile phones for cyber relational aggression.
- Boys resort to hacking and expressed cyber aggression through online games using all forms of technology

Children under 12
- Girls are more likely to be victims

- Girls are more likely to experience cyberbullying over the internet and boys via mobile phone among 7 to 11 year olds.
- There is a slight tendency for boys to engage in cyberbullying more than girls, but this varies with age: higher levels amongst girls in early adolescence and higher levels amongst boys in later adolescence.

Personality traits

Studies have focused on several personality traits concerning cyberbullying roles (aggressor and victim), such as emotional instability/neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion and found no significant relationship between them and cyberbullying. Some studies have found that victims are characterized by higher scores on the traits of openness to experience (readiness to explore, various interests, creativity), emotional instability/ neuroticism (feelings of anxiety, fear, worry, low self-esteem and depression), agreeableness (empathy, sensitivity towards others), and extraversion (sociability, self-confidence, enthusiasm). Sociable preadolescents are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying as they are open to relating with their peers through the internet and social networks, and thus they may become more vulnerable to cyberbullying. Openness to experience is a protective factor against becoming a cyberbully, and therefore, students with more cultural interests and creativity have a lower risk of becoming cyberbullies.

Cyberbullies, on the other hand, have been characterized by lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness (e.g., order, precision and fulfilling of commitments), and higher levels of neuroticism.

There are some interesting general characteristics about a cyberbully/a victim that adults should know:

General characteristics of a cyberbully

1. May have low self-esteem.
2. May be introverts, underdogs or underachievers.
3. May not know how to express anger in an appropriate manner.
4. May often feel like a victim themselves.
5. Would not say to someone in person what they say online. The cyberbully may target others online because it is anonymous and believe they will not get caught.
6. Use the internet as a way to "get even" or give vent to their frustrations.
7. Often unwilling to take responsibility for their actions.
8. Cyberbullies often do not empathize with those that are the target of their "joke." Their joke may often stem from their own inability to fit in the group. Most of their parents are less involved may not see what is wrong with a "silly online joke". They interpret it as harmless juvenile behaviour.
9. Cyberbullies may come from both ends of the social spectrum—isolated children, who lack "status" and popular "cool" children who are afraid to lose their status.
10. Cyberbullies may be unhappy children/teens who cyberbully others to make themselves feel better. Cyberbullies bully to feel powerful.

General characteristics of a victim

The victim of online bullying often suffers in silence. Researchers estimate that only **one in 10** children will inform a parent when they suffer from online harassment. And when parents don't know, they can't intervene. Here are some common characteristics of a child who may be experiencing bullying— either online or in person:

- **Growing school anxiety or phobia:** children may not want to go to school. Additionally, there can be a drastic shift in their behavior, as well as a decline in their grades and attendance.

- **Mood or attitude changes:** children may become depressed, feel hopeless, or have suicide thoughts.
- **Modifications in appearance:** children may stop eating, adopt new clothes or behaviors, quit caring for their hygiene, or isolate themselves.

Target audience for cyberbullying Online bullies have a target audience—most often their friends and acquaintances. Most victims are known to the perpetrator and many perpetrators pretend that their attack is "just a joke among friends."

PROFILES

Teachers' point of view:

VICTIMS
The primary school child
a.emotional instability:
□manifests helplessness
□low self-esteem
□anxiety
□loneliness
□sadness
□fear

b. changes in behavior
□has sudden changes in personality, behavior or health (lonely, distant, upset or sad especially during or after being online or using their phone)
□stops taking care of their hygiene
□change their dress and habits
□uses avoidance-focused strategies/ lack of attention/concentration during classes
□appears to be isolating themselves from friends or family

c. being different from their colleagues
□has different religious beliefs
□poor appearance and poor clothes
□has physical-related problems (skinny, deformity/ malformation, etc)
□has a medical related problem (obesity, depression, chronic diseases, eyeglasses, underweight, short statue)
□is a gifted child

d. health changes
□complains of headaches, stomach aches
□has a change in appetite (eats too little or too much)
□has trouble sleeping at night/ frequent nightmares

e.phone or computer habits/changes
□has a smartphone, a tablet
□uses social networking
□online self-disclosure to other persons

□seems upset after going online
□is secretive about the phone or internet use

f. school(performance, attendance, relationships)
□has unexplained decline in academic performance and school attendance (frequent absences)
□is uneasy about going to school or to social situations
□refuses to go to school; is angry or dissatisfied with a specific class or school in general
□has lost interest in the favorite hobbies/ reluctance or refusal to participate in previously enjoyed activities
□tries to stay home from school or extracurricular activities
□sometimes seems to ignore some colleagues or incidents
□sometimes looks for a friend or support
□does not recognize an incident when he/she is questioned about it in the presence of the possible aggressor
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues or teachers or parents

g. family relationships
□poor parent-child relationships
□one of the parents practices an authoritarian parenting style
□parents ignore the child's needs
□parents do not control the child's time spent on the internet or the purpose of the use of smartphone
□there is little or no family time

Other
□was a previous victim of bullying

The lower secondary school child
a.emotional instability:
□manifests helplessness
□frustration
□low self-esteem
□high anxiety
□high level of loneliness
□shows sadness
□shows fear
□shows psychoticism- a state of mind where someone is experiencing psychosis and is in a heightened state of cognitive impairment. Common symptoms: loss of interest in personal hygiene, loss of interest in activities, problems at school or work and with relationships.
□has high level of stress
□uses emotionally focused coping strategies

b. changes in behavior
□uses avoidance-focused strategies/ lack of attention/concentration during classes
□sometimes is counterattacking
□makes comments about self-harm or suicide attempts
□has behavioural problems
□has sudden changes in personality, behavior or health (lonely, distant, upset, sad or angry especially during or after being online or using their phone)
c. being different from their colleagues

□has possible sexual harassment/gender orientation
□has different religious beliefs
□poor appearance and poor clothes
□has physical-related problems (skinny, deformity/ malformation, etc)
□has a medical related problem (obesity, depression, chronic diseases, eyeglasses, underweight, short statue)
□is a gifted child

d. health changes
□complains of headaches, stomach aches
□has trouble sleeping at night/ frequent nightmares
□has a change in appetite (eats too little or too much)
□makes comments about self-harm or suicide attempts
□self-destructive behaviour such as harming themselves (unexplainable injuries)
□signs of self-mutilation (harming themselves/unexplainable injuries)

e.computer habits/changes
□has a smartphone, a tablet
□uses social networking
□online self-disclosure to other persons
□seems upset after going online
□is secretive about the phone or internet use

f. school(performance, attendance, relationships)
□has unexplained decline in academic performance and attendance
□is uneasy about going to school or to social situations
□refuses to go to school or anger or dissatisfied with a specific class or school in general
□has frequent absences
□has lost interest in the favorite hobbies/ reluctance or refusal to participate in previously enjoyed activities
□tries to stay home from school or extracurricular activities
□appears to be isolating themselves from friends or family
□sometimes seems to ignore some colleagues or incidents
□ sometimes looks for a friend or support
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues or teachers or parents
□does not recognize an incident when he/she is questioned about it in the presence of the possible aggressor

g. family relationships
□poor parent-child relationships
□one of the parents practices an authoritarian parenting style
□parents ignore the child's needs
□parents do not control the child's time spent on the internet or the purpose of the use of smartphone
□there is little or no family time

Other
□was a previous victim of bullying

CYBERBULLIES

The primary school child
a.emotional instability:
□demonstrates increasing insensitivity or callousness toward other teens
□demonstrates violent tendencies
□manifests anger
□rage
□jelousy
□hate
□low self-esteem
□has a detached manner with the inability to express emotion
□is manipulative
□often has a total disregard for the consequences of their actions

b. changes in behavior
□deals with increased behavioural issues or disciplinary actions at school (or elsewhere)

c.computer habits/changes
□gets unusually upset if they can't use their phones/laptops
□is secretive about the phone or internet use
□avoids discussions or never talk about what they do online
□quickly switches screens or hides their phones/laptops when you are close by
□laughs excessively while using their device and won't explain to you what/ why it is so funny

d. school-relationships
□sudden change of friends
□ has friends who cyber/bully
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues or teachers or parents

e. family relationships
□comes from dysfunctional families
□abusive/ toxic/non-existent relationships between family members (especially between mother and father)
□poor parent-child relationships
□one of the parents practices an authoritarian parenting style
□parents ignore the child's needs
□parents do not control the child's time spent on the internet or the purpose of the use of smartphone
□there is little or no family time

Other
□ was a previous victim of bullying

The lower secondary school child
a.emotional instability:
□demonstrates increasing insensitivity or callousness toward other teens
□demonstrates violent tendencies
□manifests anger
□rage

□jelousy
□hate
□low self-esteem
□worries about their popularity/ their technological skills and abilities
□demonstrates increasing insensitivity or callousness toward other teens
□demonstrates violent tendencies
□shows signs of psychoticism- a state of mind where someone is experiencing psychosis. Common symptoms: lack of empathy, disorganized or incoherent speech, confused thinking, strange, possibly dangerous behavior, slowed or unusual movements, problems at school and with relationships, cold, detached manner with the inability to express emotion, are manipulative, often have a total disregard for the consequences of their actions.
□is manipulative: puts on a facade of perfection (is aware of social appearance and may use relational aggression to bully and control others)

b. changes in behavior
□deals with increased behavioural issues or disciplinary actions at school (or elsewhere)
□has behavioural problems
□is involved in rule-breaking activities such as vandalism, delinquency, and even substance abuse
□increasing interest in their "lifestyle": fashion, gadgets, pubs, social-groups

c. computer habits/changes
□laughs excessively while using their device and won't explain to you what/ why it is so funny
□avoids discussions or never talk about what they do online
□seems to be using multiple online accounts or an account that is not their own
□quickly switches screens or hides their phones/laptops when you are close by
□gets unusually upset if they can't use their phones/laptops
□is secretive about the phone or internet use

d. school-relationships
□sudden change of friends
□has friends who cyber/bully (Even if they themselves would not bully others, teens sometimes give in to the peer pressure of doing so. Peer pressure is a common occurrence in cliques since the leaders of the groups incite their members to bully outsiders. If you see a clique, keep an eye on its members and watch how they interact both collectively and individually).
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues or teachers or parents

e. family relationships
□comes from dysfunctional families
□abusive/toxic/non-existent relationships between family members (especially between mother and father)
□poor parent-child relationships
□one of the parents practices an authoritarian parenting style
□parents ignore the child's needs
□parents do not control the child's time spent on the internet or the purpose of the use of smartphone
□there is little or no family time

Other
□ was a previous victim of bullying

Parents' point of view:
VICTIMS
The child:
a.emotional instability:
□shows **s**udden changes in personality, behavior or health (lonely, distant, upset, sad or angry especially during or after being online or using their phone)
□manifests helplessness
□low self-esteem
□high anxiety
□high level of loneliness
□sadness
□fear
□seems suddenly depressed
□has high level of stress

b. changes in behavior
□sometimes seems to ignore some colleagues or incidents
□has behavioural problems/ sudden changes in behavior
□torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings
□taking a long "illogical" route when walking to or from school

c. computer habits/changes
□seems upset after going online
□uses social networking
□online self-disclosure to other persons

d. school-relationships
□unexplained decline in academic performance
□is uneasy about going to school or to social situations
□has lost interest in their favourite hobbies
□tries to stay home from school or extracurricular activities
□does not recognise an incident when he/she is questioned about it in the presence of the possible aggressor
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues, teachers or parents
□appears to be isolating themselves from friends or family

e. health changes
□complains of headaches, stomach aches, or has a change in appetite
□makes comments about self-harm or suicide attempts
□signs of self-mutilation (harming themselves/unexplainable injuries)
□has trouble sleeping at night/ frequent nightmares

f. Being different
□has poor appearance and poor clothes
□has possible sexual harassment/gender orientation
□has different religious beliefs
□has physical-related problems (skinny, deformity/ malformation, etc)
□has a medical related problem (obesity, depression, chronic diseases, eyeglasses, underweight, short statue)

□is a gifted child

Other
□was a previous victim of bullying

The aggressor/cyberbully:
□manifests anger
□rage
□hate
□jelousy
□demonstrates increasing insensitivity or callousness toward other teens

b. changes in behavior
□demonstrates violent tendencies
□has friends who bully
□increasing interest in their "lifestyle": fashion, gadgets, pubs, social-groups

c. computer habits/changes
□laughs excessively while using their device and won't explain to you what/ why it is so funny
□avoids discussions or never talk about what they do online
□seems to be using multiple online accounts or an account that is not their own
□deals with increased behavioural issues or disciplinary actions at school (or elsewhere)
□worries about their popularity/ their technological skills and abilities
□is secretive about the phone or internet use
□quickly switches screens or hides their phones/laptops when you are close by
□uses their device(s) at night
□gets unusually upset if they can't use their phones/laptops

d. school-relationships
□shows dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues, teachers or parents
□has friends who cyber/bully

e. family
□is increasingly isolated from family
□comes from dysfunctional families
□abusive relationships between family members (especially between mother and father)
□poor parent-child relationships
□one of the parents practices an authoritarian parenting style
□parents ignore the child's needs
□parents do not control the child's time spent on the internet or the purpose of the use of smartphone

Physicians' point of view:
VICTIMS
□fractures
□sprained ankles
□haematomas
□tooth fractures
□sleeping disorders
□appetite disorders

□depressive, anxious state
□panic attacks, stress
□suicidal thoughts
□suicide attempts
□signs of self-mutilation (harming themselves/unexplainable injuries)
□psychosomatic signs/somatization (the expression of psychological or emotional factors as physical/ somatic symptoms. For example, stress can cause some people to develop headaches, chest pain, back pain, abdominal pain, migraines, nausea, fatigue or apathy, etc.)

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