Cyberbullying in the Arab Schools in Israel:
Ways of Coping of the Student and the School
(Short Paper)

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is defined as intentional violence through electronic media with the aim of harming or humiliating another person. Cyberbullying occurs mainly during adolescence, in the secondary school, and thus influences the functioning of the education system. The research examines this phenomenon in Arab schools, focusing on the exposure to cyberbullying and ways of coping with it of Arab youths and secondary schools, as well as the youths' position towards the schools' handling of cyberbullying. The research population consists of 11 Arab students, 7 boys and 4 girls, aged 12-18. The research approach is qualitative, when the research instrument is a semi-structured interview. The research concludes that Arab youths are exposed to cyberbullying and deal with it alone or with their parents' help as they do not trust schools to provide an effective solution, because the schools only "put out fires" and do not treat the problem from its roots.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Coping, Arab society, School, Youth.

Cyberbullying is intentional activity aiming to humiliate or harm through electronic media (text-messages, WhatsApp, e-mail, social networks – any means of sharing information online). Adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying influences many areas of their lives, and victims report greater loneliness and lower social and emotional efficacy (Tsouna, 2018). Smartphone proliferation has left schools without effective tools for dealing with cyberbullying. Israeli youths use smartphones more than five hours a day; this usage has physical, emotional, and social implications (Israeli Internet Association, 2015).

Arab society in Israel is a traditional and patriarchal society undergoing processes of modernization and experiencing many changes (Hadad Haj Yahia & Asaf, 2017). Arabs in Israel live in communities ranked lower socio-economically and lack access to recreational frameworks, thus leading to many hours spent online by Arab youths (Knesset, 2020). 28% of those seeking help from the Israeli Internet Association hotline because of cyberbullying are from Arab society (Knesset, 2018).

The research objective is to describe cyberbullying in Arab schools and the ways schools and students cope.

Method

The method is qualitative. The population consists of 11 Arab students, 7 boys and 4 girls, aged 12-18, from 4 middle schools and 2 high schools in the center and north of Israel. The instrument is a semi-structured interview and thematic data analysis. Parental consent for student participation in the research was obtained via telephone. After students consented to participate, Zoom interviews were held. Complete anonymity was assured.

Findings

Exposure to Cyberbullying: The Self and Others

The Self. Three female students were victims of cyberbullying. "I began to receive pictures…into a closed Snapchat group…she clearly incited girls against me."

Others. Most interviewees were exposed to cyberbullying of another student. "Once guys photographed somebody as he walked…posted his photo with funny words…he objected…his parents intervened." In another case, the victim involved the homeroom-teacher. "Students targeted another student, the homeroom-teacher came and spoke to us and warned our mothers about making fun of him online." In other cases, mainly involving girls, the response was sharp. "A student settled scores online under another student's name and sent a friend request to a male student and continued to send messages, until parents knew about this student that another is using her name. There was a big mess, there was an investigation until the 'pretender' confessed." "Boys and girls wrote names of boys and girls who were in a relationship and spread the 'knowledge' to the entire school. This reached the Police." Only three students noted no exposure to cyberbullying. Two students in private school said their school cultivates 'solidarity' and prevents 'bullying'. "I don't remember in our school an incident of bullying, we are all friends, we do not allow this."

Dealing with Cyberbullying

Most students maintained the school is not effective and only addresses specific problems. "This girl was absent from school for a number of days. Although the school tried to solve the problem, it insisted these students who laughed at her ask for her forgiveness." Because of its ineffective handling, "the student suffered from social exclusion…and was forced to move schools, the school didn't solve the problem."

In cases of shaming a female student, the school acts immediately. "A male student photographed a female student in an unpleasant pose and posted it…the principal immediately asked to delete it."

Many students do not rely on the school to tackle cyberbullying because of its inadequate handling. They (mainly boys, less girls) prefer to approach the bully. "I will attempt to clarify why this kid uploaded a clip of me and ask him to erase it and not do it again." The students (mainly girls, less boys) also prefer to involve their parents. "If I didn't get the clip deleted, I will involve my parents…so my parents will turn to her parents, or the teacher, to solve the problem." The students also prefer turning to the Police. "Why embarrass myself in front of the school and teachers and students, it's better to contact the Police hotline."

Impact on the Victim

Decline in mental state. "For a month they opened groups to laugh at her…she knew and her mental state deteriorated." "The film was sent to the entire school, the student herself knew…the girl was greatly harmed mentally and cried when she was with the teacher."

Absence from school. "This student was absent sometimes for weeks from school…this hurt her achievements. I heard there is a law obligating a school to clarify the situation if a student is absent for many days. I think she intentionally was absent so they would know there is a problem and solve it."

Social exclusion. "The entire class kept away from her and were against her…she felt the class doesn't want her."

Departure from school. "Once students took 'shameful' clips of another student…she moved to another school."

Student Recommendations

Social solidarity and belonging: "The teachers all the time engage in this topic, that we are like siblings and should go hand-in-hand, I study in a private school. Our teacher is amazing, all the time talking with us that we are friends and brothers."

Strong teacher involvement: "In seventh grade our homeroom-teacher was weak and discriminated against some students… there were many problems and students mocked one another…Now we have a strong homeroom-teacher and there is a change in the class atmosphere…the teacher's relationship with students increases or decreases bullying."

Sanctions: "Schools must give longer suspensions and impose sanctions on those who post clips, so they stop."

Encouragement: "Schools need to talk with children who were victims, encourage and reinforce them."

Conclusion

The research shows Arab schools do not effectively tackle cyberbullying, thus detrimentally influencing students. The research also found Arab schools immediately handled incidents of shaming/rumors involving girls, to protect family honor. Students assert they cannot rely on the school and therefore rely on themselves, their parents, and the Police. The research indicates the school type, private or public, as a factor: in private schools the vision of a positive social climate, with respect and belonging, helps prevent cyberbullying.

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