

AN INVESTIGATION OF ADOLESCENTS' LEVELS OF EXPOSURE TO CYBERBULLYING IN TERMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL APPEARANCE ANXIETY

Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate adolescents' levels of exposure to cyberbullying in terms of social media attitudes and social appearance anxiety. To that end, adolescents were reached on online platforms in an attempt. 292 girls and 158 boys (450 individuals in total) were included in the research. Ages of the participants ranged between 14 and 18 years, and their mean age was found to be 16.45 years (sd=1.14). Cyberbullying Scale, Social Media Attitude Scale and Social Appearance Scale for Adolescents were utilized for data collection. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficient was used for correlational analyses while Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis method was utilized in the regression analysis. The research results showed significant relationships between scores of cyberbullying, social appearance anxiety, social media attitudes, and subscale scores of social media attitudes. It was concluded with the regression model that social appearance anxiety and subscales of social media attitudes explained cyberbullying by 28%. In light of these results, recommendations were provided about activities that can be conducted on adolescents' social appearance anxiety and social media attitudes.

Keywords: Social media, cyberbullying, social appearance anxiety, adolescence

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is defined as a period between childhood and adulthood which involves cognitive, socio-emotional and biological changes (Santrock, 2012a). Girls enter this period at about 11 years of age and boys at about 13 years of age. Adaptation of adolescents to rapid changes in their bodies is recognized as an important problem for this period (Senemoğlu, 2013). Individuals may have increased levels of concerns about their bodies especially in early adolescence (Santrock, 2012b). Adolescents' evaluations of their own bodies can affect their mental health and cause them to have problems such as social anxiety (Aslan and Koç, 2018). In this process, attraction felt by adolescents about their bodies can play a role in peer relationships, comparison of their bodies, and social appearance anxiety (Davison and McCabe, 2006). Nevertheless, physical attraction has been found positively correlated with academic competency (Lerner et al., 1990), popularity among peers (Boyatzis, Baloff & Durieux, 1997), anger levels (Borch, Hyde & Cillessen, 2011; Zwaan, 2010), and self-esteem (Wade, 1991) among adolescents. Adolescents' evaluations of their own bodies can also be effective in their personality development (Dolgin, 2014). When evaluation their own appearances, adolescents can make comparisons with their peers (Jones, 2001) and utilize feedbacks from their peers (McCabe & Ricardelli, 2001). Individuals' own evaluations of their bodies and others' evaluations can lead to social physique anxiety (Hart, Leary & Rejeski, 1989) and social appearance anxiety (Hart et al., 2008).

Social physique anxiety, a type of social anxiety, was defined as the anxiety experienced by individuals about others' evaluations of their physical appearance (height, weight, muscles) (Hart, Leary & Rejeski, 1989). In social appearance anxiety, concepts such as facial structure, dimensions and skin color were included besides physical appearance (Hart et al., 2008). Adolescence can be a risky period for social appearance anxiety (Alemdağ, Alemdağ & Özkara, 2016). It has been observed that social appearance anxiety experienced during adolescent is negatively correlated with parents' low educational levels (Özcan et al., 2013; Şahin, Barut & Erşanlı, 2013), self-esteem (Çelik & Güzel, 2018; Özcan et al., 2013; Şahin, Barut, Erşanlı and Kumcağız, 2014; Şirin, 2015) and

cognitive awareness (Çelik, Turan & Arıcı, 2014) and positively correlated with social anxiety (Hart et al., 2008; Levingson & Rodebaugh, 2011), extroversion (Levingson & Rodebaugh, 2011), eating disorders (Brosof & Levinson, 2017; Koskina et al., 2013), body checking behaviors (White, 2008) and risk-taking behaviors (Ekşi, Arıcan & Yaman, 2016).

Social appearance anxiety can be caused by individual's self-evaluations and other peoples' evaluation of them (Hart et al., 2008). One of the channels for such evaluation can be social media. Social media has found itself an important place in everyday lives of people with the developments in Web 2.0 (Büyüksener, 2009). According to the report by Turkish Statistical Institute, 55.9% of individuals use information technologies, and social media takes the first place among Internet usage purposes by 80.9% (TSI, 2015). A study found that 89.2% of adolescents had a social media account (Alican & Saban, 2013). It was found in another study that 95.9% of adolescents had Internet access at home and 75% of them had a Facebook account (Tiggeman & Slater, 2013). As suggested by recent studies, Instagram is the most preferred social media channel (Çömlekçi and Başol, 2019; Uysal, 2020). It has been concluded that younger and male adolescents use social media more (Alican & Saban, 2013; Otrar & Arğin, 2014). Adolescents can socialize with their peers on Internet by keeping in touch with them and being informed about them (Ekşi, Erden, Erdoğan & Yılmaz, 2013).

It is thought that social media channels cannot fully meet socializing needs of adolescents (Eni, 2017); however, communication with peers can be important to adolescents in this period (Steinberg, 2013). Given the popularity of social media use and socializing needs of adolescents, it can be more positive for adolescents not to prohibit the use of social media but work on problematic social media use (Banyai et al., 2017). Considering the problematic social media use by adolescents, it has been observed to be positively correlated with loneliness (Barry et al., 2017; Eni, 2017), unhealthy family functions (Yayman, 2019), loneliness in romantic and family relationships (Doğan and Karakaş, 2016), anxiety and depression (Barry et al., 2017) and negatively correlated with

self-esteem (Banyai et al., 2017; Kelly, Zilanawala, Booker & Sacker, 2018) and cognitive flexibility (Peker & Çukadar, 2016). On the other hand, internalization of appearances which are presented as being ideal in traditional media or social media (Özgüngör & Arıcioğlu, 2020; Trekels and Eggermont, 2017) can cause adolescents to develop anxiety about their own appearances. It was concluded in a research on Facebook usage by adolescents that adolescents followed fan groups more (Ekşi, Erden, Erdoğan & Yılmaz, 2013). Hence, how they compare their own appearances with people whom they perceive as ideal on social media can lead to negative body image (Bayköse & Esin, 2019; Ho, Lee & Liao, 2016; Lee, Lee, Choi, Kim & Han, 2014; Tiggeman & Slatter, 2013).

Feedbacks received by adolescents on social media and comparing themselves with others have been found correlated with negative mental health (Bayköse & Esin, 2019; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Some of these feedbacks can be of disturbing content (Kelly et al., 2018). Thus, there might be discussions among adolescents (Ekşi, Erden, Erdoğan & Yılmaz, 2013). Adolescents can be subjected to bullying behaviors of their peers and negative feedbacks on online platforms outside the school as well (Taştekin & Bayhan, 2018).

Peer bullying or victimization is described as individual's repeated exposure to negative actions of a person or a group. Features of bullying include power imbalance between parties and victim's helplessness in defending themselves (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1994). Bullying-related behaviors include nicknaming, a group's negligence of the individual, aggressive behaviors, spreading untrue words about the individual, and other offending thoughts about the individual (Olweus, 2012). School is the primary setting where such behaviors are originated (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012). Factors such as advancing technology and increased access to information have changed the nature of bullying. Accordingly, cyberbullying is described as purposeful, recurrent and hurting behaviors in online settings (e.g. computers, mobile phones) (Belsey, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Characteristics that distinguish cyberbullying from classical bullying include that such behaviors take place not only in the school

environment but also online, that bullying is witnessed by more people, and that it is not necessarily a face-to-face action (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Male students have been found to be in the risk group in exhibiting and being victimized by cyberbullying behaviors (Arıcak et al., 2008; Erdur-Baker & Kavşut, 2007; Peker, Eroğlu & Çitemel, 2012). Furthermore, those who spend more time on Internet and have problematic Internet use might be exposed to cyberbullying and cyberbully others more (Altundağ, 2016; Serin, 2012). Risky environments for cyberbullying primarily include Facebook, text messages, and interactive gaming sites (Özdemir & Akar, 2011). Adolescents can exhibit such behaviors for reasons such as feeling good, having fun, gaining popularity, and retaliating (Yaman & Paker, 2012).

Cyberbullying behaviors may cause adolescents to develop negative feelings and thoughts (Şahin, Sarı, Özer & Er, 2010). Among adolescents, those who construct their self-values on their physical appearances and share relevant posts on social media can be subjected to cyberbullying even more (Eroğlu & Güler, 2015). It has been observed that cyberbullying experiences are negatively correlated with self-esteem (Chang et al., 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010) and positively correlated with depression (Ybarra, 2004; Chang et al., 2013), social anxiety (Coelho & Romao, 2018; Fahy et al., 2016; Juvonen & Gross, 2008), and loneliness (Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman & Eden, 2012). In light of the abovementioned information, this research examined the relationships between high school students' social media attitudes, cyberbullying behaviors experienced by them and their social appearance anxiety.

METHOD

RESEARCH MODEL

This study was designed in the survey research model. In this research model which is suitable for research involving a large sample, it is attempted to determine views and thoughts of participants (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

PARTICIPANTS

The research participants were composed of 450 students studying at high schools in different

provinces of Turkey. 292 (65%) of these students are girls and 158 (35%) of them are boys. Ages of the students ranged between 14 and 18 years. Their mean age was found to be 16.45 years ($sd=1.14$). As for the age distribution, 11 students (2.4%) were 14 years old, 104 (23.1%) were 15 years old, 106 (23.6%) were 16 years old, 128 (28.5%) were 17 years old, and 101 (22.4%) were 18 years old.

MEASURES

Demographics Form

Questions of the form asked participants about their age, gender, the most preferred social media channel, time they spared for social media in a day, and for how long they had been using social media.

Social Media Attitude Scale

Developed by Otrar and Arğin (2015), the Social Media Attitude Scale consists of 23 items. Of 23 items, 17 are positive statements and 6 are negative statements. The scale has four subscales which are need for sharing, social isolation, social competence, and relation with teachers. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be .85. Factor analysis conducted for validity studies found a KMO value of .83. The scale was developed in Turkey. The scale was applied to 302 secondary and high school students during development. It is therefore fit for applying to the sample of this research.

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale among Adolescents

Developed by Hart et al. (2008), the scale was adapted into Turkish by Doğan (2011). It is a 16-item, 5-point Likert scale. In the Turkish adaptation studies, the scale was found to have one factor and this one-factor construct explained 53.4% of the variance. The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that the values were on a good level. The fact that the validity and reliability studies of the scale conducted with the age group of 12-15 years show that the scale is fit for use in this research. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be .91.

Cyberbullying Scale

Developed by Stewart et al. (2014), the scale was adapted into Turkish by Küçük (2016). The scale consists of 16 items, 2 of which are multiple-choice and 14 of which are 5-point Likert. The developers of the scale found the scale to have a high validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be .87. In the Turkish adaptation studies, the scale was found to be valid and reliable.

DATA ANALYSIS

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficient was used to analyze the correlations between the variables. Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis method was utilized to find to what extent social appearance anxiety, and social media attitudes explained the levels of exposure to cyberbullying (Can, 2017; Kilmen, 2015). Participants were reached on online platforms in an attempt.

FINDINGS

According to the demographic findings, 106 (23.6%) of the students had been using social media for 1-3 years, 200 (44.4%) for 3-5 years, and 144 (32%) for more than 5 years. As for social media habits, 167 (37.1%) of them spent 1-3 hours, 178 (39.6%) 3-5 hours, 77 (17.1%) 5-8 hours, and 28 (6.2%) more than 8 hours on social media daily. The most used social media channel was found to be Instagram by 66.7%, which was followed by YouTube by 20.7%. Other preferred channels included WhatsApp (7.4%), Twitter (5.3%), and Facebook (0.9%). As stated by the participants, 277 (61.5%) had been subjected to cyberbullying via one way or more (text message, social media, games, etc.) within the last month, 136 (30.2%) had cyberbullied others, and 132 (29.3%) had been subjected to cyberbullying and cyberbullied others. Mean scores obtained by the participants in the scales of cyberbullying, social appearance anxiety and social media attitudes, Cronbach's alphas of the scales, and the relationships between the scores are examined in Table 1. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation method was applied in the correlational analysis.

Table 1. Mean scores and Cronbach’s alphas of the scales, and results of correlation

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Cyberbullying	1						
2. Social Appearance Anxiety	.43**	1					
3. Social Media Attitudes	.18**	.11*	1				
4. Social competence	.40**	.33**	.70**	1			
5. Need for sharing	.21**	.11*	.84**	.57**	1		
6. Relation with teachers	.16**	.13**	.57**	.38**	.37**	1	
7. Social isolation	.35**	.29**	-.13**	.37**	.19**	.21**	1
Mean	21.54	35.09	70.35	12.92	26.29	7.2	12.04
Standard Deviation	8.94	15.25	12.91	5.51	7.36	3.75	5.86
Cronbach’s alpha	.91	.94	.79	.80	.82	.84	.87

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

According to Table 1, social appearance anxiety scores and cyberbullying scores had a moderate positive significant correlation ($r=.43$, $p<0.01$). Positive significant correlations were found between scores of cyberbullying and social media attitudes ($r=.18$, $p<0.01$) subscales of social media attitudes which are social competence ($r=.40$, $p<0.01$), need for sharing ($r=.21$, $p<0.01$), relation with teachers ($r=.16$, $p<0.01$) and social isolation ($r=.35$, $p<0.01$). Positive significant correlations were also found between scores of social appearance anxiety and social media attitudes ($r=.11$, $p<0.05$) subscales of social media attitudes which are social competence ($r=.33$, $p<0.01$), need for sharing ($r=.11$, $p<0.06$), relation with teachers ($r=.13$, $p<0.01$) and social isolation ($r=.29$, $p<0.01$). Scores of social media attitudes score were found to be positive significantly correlated with scores of social competence ($r=.70$, $p<0.01$), need for sharing

($r=.84$, $p<0.01$), relation with teachers ($r=.57$, $p<0.01$) and negative significantly correlated with social isolation scores ($r=.13$, $p<0.01$). Subscale scores of social competence were found to be positive significantly correlated with scores of need for sharing ($r=.57$, $p<0.01$), relation with teachers ($r=.38$, $p<0.01$) and social isolation ($r=.37$, $p<0.01$). Subscale scores of need for sharing were found to be positive significantly correlated with scores of relation with teachers ($r=.37$, $p<0.01$) and social isolation ($r=.19$, $p<0.01$). A positive significant correlation was found between the subscale scores of relation with teachers and social isolation ($r=.21$, $p<0.01$). Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis results are presented in Table 2. At the beginning of the regression analysis, social appearance anxiety scores were in the first block. Scores of social media attitudes were included in the second block.

Table 2. Multiple hierarchical regression analysis on levels of exposure to cyberbullying

		R	R ²	R ² _{ch}	B	β	t	p
1	Constant	.43	.18	.18	12.75		13.31	0.00
	Social Appearance Anxiety				0.25	0.43	10.00	0.00
2	Constant	.53	.28	.27	6.96		4.46	0.00
	Social Appearance Anxiety				0.18	0.30	7.00	0.00
	Need for sharing				0.02	0.02	0.35	0.72
	Relation with teachers				-0.01	-0.00	-0.12	0.90
	Social Competence				0.36	0.22	4.72	0.00
	Social Isolation				0.27	0.18	4.01	0.00

As shown in Table 2, social appearance anxiety alone explained 18% of cyberbullying ($R^2=0.18$, $p<0.01$). When scores of need for sharing, relation with teachers, social isolation and social competence which are subscales of social media attitudes were included in the model, all of them were found to explain 28% of cyberbullying ($R^2=0.28$, $p<0.01$). In the model, cyberbullying

scores were observed to be positive significantly predicted by scores of social appearance anxiety

($\beta=0.30$, $p<0,01$), social competence ($\beta=0.22$, $p<0,01$) and social isolation ($\beta=0.18$, $p<0,01$).

DISCUSSION

In this research, the relationships between exposure to cyberbullying, social media attitudes and social appearance anxiety was examined. The analyses performed accordingly indicated that high school students are under risk in regard to cyberbullying. As reported by the students, 61.5% had been subjected to at least one of the cyberbullying behaviors within the last month, 30.2% had exhibited cyberbullying behaviors, and 29.3% had been subjected to cyberbullying and cyberbullied others. In a study on prevalence of cyberbullying, it was found that 35.7% of students exhibited cyberbullying behaviors, 23.8% of them were both bullies and victims, and 5.9% were victims (Arıcağ et al., 2008). In another study, 29% of students were found to be victims while 11% were bullies (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Higher rates and numbers found in this study than in others were attributed to the fact that the adolescents had spent much time on social media and digital games during the latest isolation process within the last month.

According to the correlational analyses, adolescents' levels of social appearance anxiety increased with increased levels of exposure to cyberbullying. Since social appearance anxiety can be influenced by external evaluations, negative feedbacks received by adolescents on digital media can adversely affect them. Online bullying has been emphasized to be correlated with social anxiety (Coelho & Romao, 2018; Fahy et al., 2016; Pabian & Vandeborch, 2016). Another study concluded that body dissatisfaction predicted cyberbullying (Salazar, 2017). A low positive correlation was found between social media attitudes and social appearance anxiety. Problematic social media use was found to be correlated with anxiety in the literature (Woods & Scott, 2016). Social appearance anxiety is addressed as a type of anxiety. Studies have shown that individuals using social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook develop social physique anxiety and social appearance anxiety more (Aston, 2018; Doğan & Çolak, 2016; Intan, 2019). Another finding of the present study is the positive correlation between cyberbullying and social media attitudes. It is stated that social media bears more risk for cyberbullying (Özdemir & Akar, 2011) and those who spend more time on

Internet and have problematic Internet use form the risk group for cyberbullying (Altundağ, 2016; Serin, 2012). Positive significant correlations were found between scores of need for sharing, social isolation,

relation with teachers, and social competence which are the subscales of social media attitudes. According to the regression analysis, scores of social appearance anxiety and subscale scores of social media attitudes explained 28% of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying was found to be predicted by the scores of social appearance anxiety, social isolation and social competence. In regard to social competence which involves subjects such as need for prestige, establishing and maintaining relationships with friends, adolescents can spend more time on social media. In a study, duration of weekly Internet use was observed to a predictor of cyber-victimization (Peker, Eroğlu & Ada, 2012). In other studies, it has been emphasized that those who have problematic Internet use are under risk for cyber-victimization and cyberbullying (Altundağ, 2016; Eroğlu & Güler, 2015; Kircaburun, Demetrovics, Kiraly & Griffiths, 2018; Serin, 2012). Regarding social isolation, friendships and family relations can be negatively affected by the time that adolescents spend on social media. A study found that increased frequency of social media use affected family communication negatively (Demir, 2016). Another study found cyberbullying and loneliness to be correlated (Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman & Eden, 2012). Self-esteem, empathy, and loneliness were found to be predictors of cyberbullying (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015). It was found in the present study that social appearance anxiety predicted cyberbullying positive significantly. It is seen in the literature that social anxiety and cyberbullying are positively correlated (Coelho & Romao, 2018; Fahy et al., 2016; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Students who have social appearance anxiety as a type of social anxiety may be under risk for cyberbullying. This research aimed to examine the relationships between social media attitudes, cyberbullying and social appearance anxiety. Significant correlations were found in all score types. A correlation was found between cyberbullying and social appearance anxiety. Higher scores of social media attitudes among adolescents might cause them to be subjected to cyberbullying. By its nature, cyberbullying can affect students in different domains. For social appearance anxiety which can increase with bodily changes during adolescence, cyberbullying is a

risky factor. Thus, it is important to carry out activities for teachers, students and parents about "safe internet and social media use" within the scope of psychological counseling and guidance services in schools. The research contains information for

school counselors in terms of practices in schools. School counselors can benefit from this information for their practice. On the other hand, when the limitations of the study were examined, the data was collected online, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, students may have spent more time on social media and internet during this pandemic

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