



Online sexual harassment among peers and cybervictimization: associations and predictors

Dott.ssa Angela Franceschi, PhD Student – angela.franceschi@unifi.it

Introduction

Adolescents' daily use of the Internet and social networks has led to increased interest in the **prevalence rates, risk factors, and potential consequences of online victimization**. Among the forms of online peer victimization, several studies have highlighted a correlation between cyberbullying and cybervictimization behaviors and online sexual harassment behaviors. The intention to harm the victim, the use of various forms of aggression (photos, videos, messages) and the absence of geographical and temporal limits typical of the virtual context make these two forms of online victimization very similar.

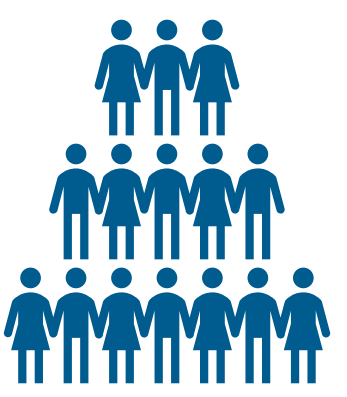
The literature highlighted **several common risk factors**, such as substance use, high impulsivity, and low empathy and self-esteem (Endresen & Olweus, 2001; Farrington & Baldry, 2010; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Sharp et al., 2013).

Furthermore, some studies highlight important associations between positive peer relationships and lower rates of victimization (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Kilian et al., 2007; Welsh, 2000).

Aims and Method

The aim of this work is therefore to **investigate the prevalence rates of cybervictimization and online sexual harassment** in a sample of Italian adolescents, understand whether these two behaviors are correlated with each other and **identify and compare individual and contextual risk factors both for cybervictimization and online sexual harassment**.

The sample of this study includes the fourth and fifth surveys of the PRIN project "Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups". The data was collected in **January 2022 and June 2022**. The sample consists of **697 participants, with an average age of 15.17 years (SD=.68)**. **42.3% are girls and 80.9% are of Italian nationality**.



- *Peer Sexual Cybervictimization Scale – revised (Sanchez et al., 2017)*
- *Florence Cyberbullying And Cybervictimization Scales - Short Version Revised (Palladino, Nocentini, Menesini, 2015)*
- *Strengh and Difficulties Questionnaires – SDQ (Goodman, 1997)*
- *Georgia Health School Survey – GHSS (La Salle et al., 2014)*



Analyzes were performed using **SPSS (IBM Corp, 2020)** and **MPlus 7.0 (2017)** software. We first examined **bivariate associations** between the full list of study variables, online sexual harassment, and cybervictimization to determine whether the risk profiles of these forms of online victimization were similar or different. Subsequently, we used a **path analysis model** to test the association between psychological problems, school climate, cybervictimization and online sexual harassment.

Results

In the first survey (survey 4), **36.7%** of interviewees stated that they had been victims of online sexual harassment between peers at least once. The data relating to cybervictimization are very similar (**37.4%**). **Being a victim of cybervictimization is positively associated with being a victim of online peer sexual harassment ($\rho_s=.426^{**}$)**. Since the trend of the two phenomena seems to be very similar, an association between psychological problems, school climate, cyber-victimization and online sexual harassment has been hypothesized.

The results highlight how **online sexual harassment and cybervictimization are positively correlated with each other ($\beta =.492^{**}$, $SE=.06$)** and seem to be explained by different factors. Specifically, **cybervictimization at survey 5 is predicted by the presence of problematic peer relationships ($\beta=.169^*$, $SE=.06$) and by the lack of school connection ($\beta=-.189^*$, $SE=.08$) at survey 4**. The presence of **online sexual harassment among peers at survey 5 is instead predicted by the presence of emotional symptoms ($\beta=.244^{**}$, $SE=.07$) and the absence of social and civic norms ($\beta=-.257^{**}$, $SE=.07$) =.08) at survey 4**.

Model Fit: $\chi^2(55) = 2540.143$, $p < .001$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00 RMSEA = .000, [CI] 90% = .000;.000; WRMR = .001.

Conclusions

Online sexual harassment and cybervictimization are related phenomena.

However, the **risk factors appear to be different**: cybervictimization remains more linked to the school context, where the size of group and school dynamics and the relationship with peers are important predictors. Online sexual harassment is instead less linked to class factors and more to social factors (see, non-discriminatory environment, etc.), although individual characteristics remain important, so much so that this form of victimization is often associated with depressive and anxious symptoms.

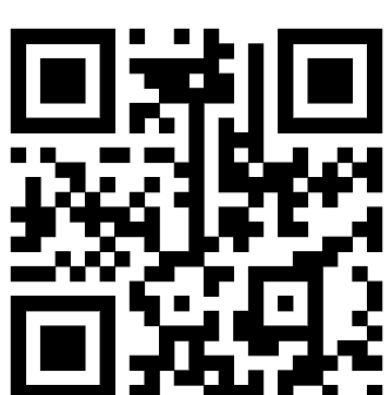
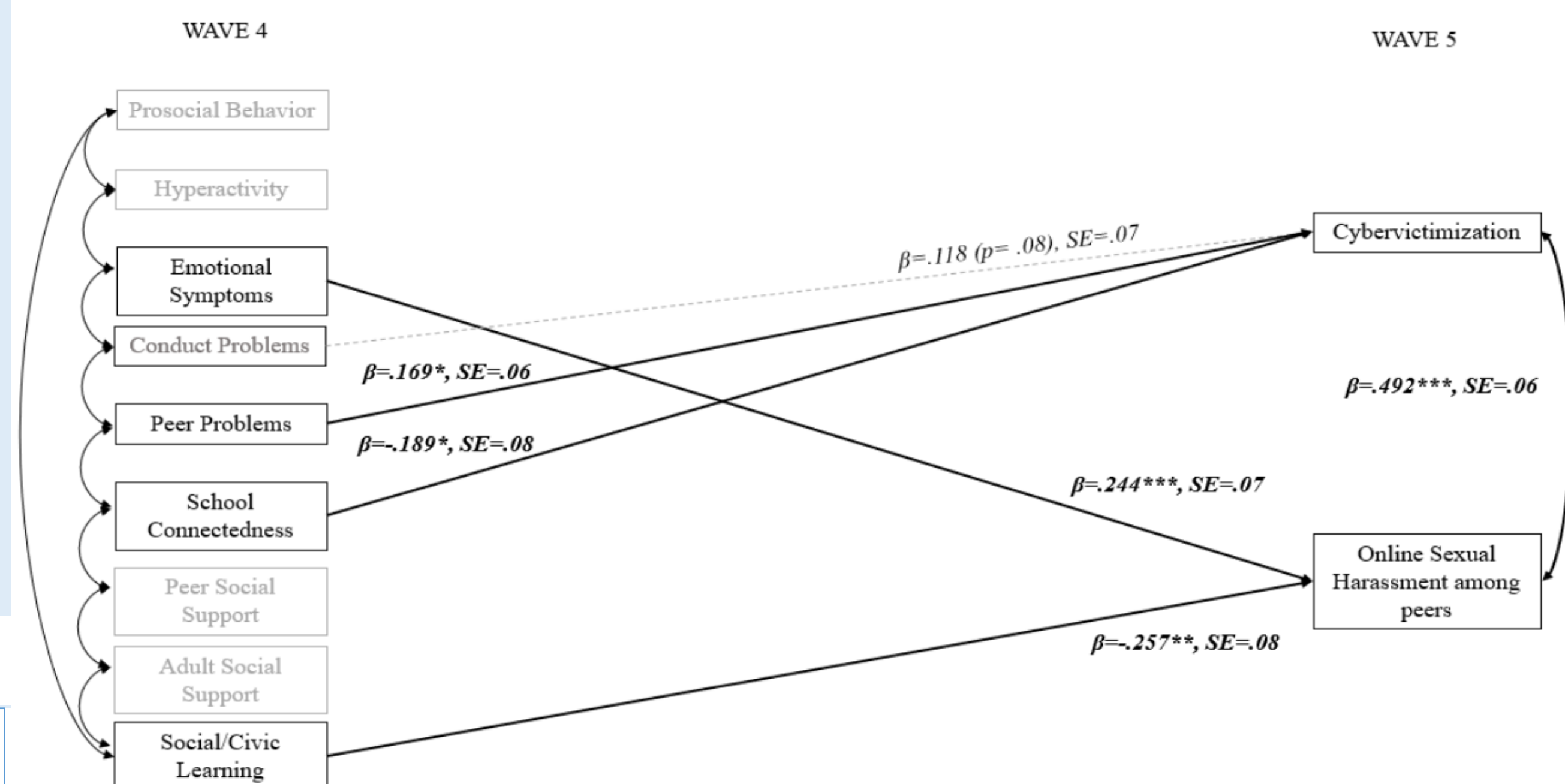
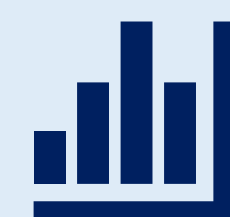
Strenght and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)

| | Pearson correlation | Prosocial behavior | Hyperactivity | Emotional symptoms | Conduct Problems | Peer problems |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| CV | \ | -.083 (NS) | .164** | .249** | .215** | .147** |
| OSH-P | \ | .002 (NS) | .179** | .226** | .196** | .178** |

Georgia Health School Survey (GHSS)

| | Pearson correlation | School Connectedness | Peer Social Support | Adult Social Support | Social/Civic Learning |
|-------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| CV | \ | -.157** | -.095 (NS) | -.184** | -.221** |
| OSH-P | \ | -.158** | -.065 (NS) | -.091 (NS) | -.116* |

Note: *= p -value<.05; **= p -value<.01; ***= p -value<.001.



References

