

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBESITY, BODY IMAGE, SELF-ESTEEM AND CYBER VICTIMIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is described as a pattern of repeated acts of violence committed against victims due to an imbalance of power. With the development of digital communication technologies like the internet and mobile phones, a new form of bullying known as "cyberbullying" has emerged. Cyberbullying is the intentional, recurrent, and harmful behavior of people or groups using communications technologies. Social media users are vulnerable to cyberbullying due to the independence of its users in terms of choosing when and what to post. Self-esteem is a concept related to how a person perceives themselves in terms of appearance, relationships, success in school and business life, and complete competence and worthiness. Low quality of life, being overweight, athletic inadequacy, and social relationship disorders may cause a decrease in self-esteem in children and adolescents. Lack of confidence and various psychological issues are caused by low self-esteem. Obesity is a chronic illness, and the negative perceptions of obese people held by the public harm such individuals' relationships with others and lower their self-esteem. On social media, people who are obese often get mocking comments about their looks. Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to experience verbal, relational, and physical bullying than their normal-weight peers. Due to the stigma and discrimination associated with obesity, as well as the increased visibility of offensive comments or images through social media, weight-based victimization in online environments can have a negative impact on adolescents' psychological and physical health. Teenagers who have experienced cyberbullying are more likely to believe their bodies are "too fat" than those who have not. Cyberbullying is linked to a wide range of physiological and psychological issues. The prevalence of depression, stress, and suicidal thoughts has increased among obese people as a result of cyberbullying. Obese girls are victims of bullying at a significantly higher rate than obese boys. Various options, such as social and professional help and support groups can prevent the damage to self-esteem in the overweight and obese groups. Internet addiction and cyberbullying can be prevented by conscious internet use, informing children and adults, and parents restricting the internet use of their children. This review examines the relationship between cyberbullying and obesity while emphasizing its causes and results.

Keywords: Body image, cyberbullying, obesity, self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

With the development of new communication technologies, electronic devices, and the internet are now found in all areas of our lives. Young individuals particularly see electronic communication tools as an important part of their social life. Despite technology being a tool that facilitates the fulfillment of daily tasks, a new form of peer bullying encountered in the virtual environment called cyberbullying has been introduced. Being independent in choosing which content to interact with, the amount of time spent on platforms, and

having two-way communication make social media users vulnerable to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a deliberate, repetitive, and damaging behavior for individuals or groups using communication technologies. It includes threats, harassment, humiliation, sharing inappropriate content, and insulting behavior. Cyberbullying causes the number of victims to be higher than traditional bullying since concepts such as time, space, and physical strength are nonexistent. Additionally, easy access to the target individual and the concealment of the identity of the cyberbully make the act of cyberbullying more prevalent (1). Previous research examining



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the relationship between body mass index (BMI) and peer victimization discovered that children who are overweight or obese are more vulnerable to verbal, relational, and physical bullying than children who have a healthy weight (2, 3). In cyberspace, there is an obvious risk of stigma and victimization for those who are obese or overweight. In a study on school-aged adolescents seeking treatment for weight loss, more than half of the participants stated that they have encountered weight-based cyberbullying on computers or mobile devices. Sixty-one percent of these young people were exposed to embarrassing comments, while 59% were sent upsetting messages or emails (3). According to a study on residential patients with severe obesity, obese adolescents are more likely to be bullied online than their peers who have normal weight (4). Teenagers who have experienced cyberbullying are twice as likely to believe their bodies are "too fat" than those who have not (5). Additionally, body dissatisfaction is related to cyberbullying victimization (5). Adolescents' psychological and physical health can be affected negatively by weight-based victimization in online environments due to the stigma and prejudice associated with obesity, as well as the increased visibility of offensive comments or images through social media (6-8).

We aimed to compile the literature that explores the relationship between cyberbullying, obesity, self-esteem, and body image to deliver the results identified.

DEFINITION OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem, a multidimensional concept of competence and worthiness, is strongly influenced by how individuals perceive themselves in various aspects such as physical appearance, social relations, success in school and business life (9). Self-esteem progresses from infancy to death and is affected by positive or negative events in the person's experience. Especially in infancy and childhood, the relationship with the mother enables the individual to gain self-esteem as well as a sense of trust. Mother's love in infancy grants the individual feelings of being liked and loved. These feelings are developed in childhood with friends and teachers. If the individual can communicate adequately and positively with friends and teachers during childhood, self-esteem increases. While supporting and admiring children in social relations increase self-esteem, being compared to others and not being supported reduce self-esteem. In the transition to adolescence, individuals begin to know themselves and become aware of their values. With adolescence, self-esteem develops as the personality is established (10, 11).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBESITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

Obesity is a chronic disease and how the society perceives obese individuals damage both their social relations and self-esteem. Persons who are overweight or obese are stigmatized as "slobs", "fatties", and "people who lack self-control and willpower". This dominant and negative automatic response

establishes a basis for discrimination (12). Since being thin is appreciated in societies that have adopted a Western way of thinking, overweight individuals are often excluded from society (12). In narrative studies, some people expressed discomfort and disgust when they were seated next to overweight or obese people on buses, trains, or at events (12, 13). This causes obese individuals to feel negative about their bodies and have negative self-concepts (13).

Cameron (14) and Hesketh et al. (15) listed social and environmental communication disorders, being overweight, exclusion, and stigmatization among the causes of low self-esteem, stating that obese adolescents and children have lower self-esteem compared to other individuals (16). Low quality of life, being overweight, athletic inadequacy, and social relationship disorders cause a decrease in self-esteem in children and adolescents (17). A parallel increase in self-esteem was not observed in obese children and adolescents who lost weight and achieved their healthy weight, indicating that obesity is not the sole factor affecting self-esteem (17, 18). Allen et al. (19), who interviewed both overweight and normal-weight children between the ages of 7-13, determined that low self-esteem is not only a result of weight but also a result of body discontent and low self-confidence. Strauss (20) observed obese and normal-weight children for 4 years. Before starting the study, the self-esteem of obese and normal-weight individuals was high and similar. After 4 years, body esteem of obese girls and boys was found to be lower than that of normal-weight boys and girls. Some studies demonstrate that the increase or decrease in body esteem is not only related to BMI, but to several different factors (16, 21-23). The age group in which the relationship between body esteem and body weight is the most significant is adolescents (16). It has not yet been clarified whether low self-esteem is the cause or the result of obesity. Low self-esteem also has many psychological consequences (21). Relationship status and employment are among the determining factors of self-esteem in obese individuals (10). Increased body dissatisfaction is associated with lower self-esteem and increased levels of depressive symptoms (24). Being female, unemployed, obese, and single has been found to be associated with increased body dissatisfaction (25-27). Body dissatisfaction in obese individuals is related to how they perceive their bodies rather than their actual body weight (27). Therefore, focusing on improving the patient's body image may be an integral part of obesity treatment (27). Given the number of factors affecting lower self-perception, a multidisciplinary treatment approach may be necessary when treating patients with obesity. Another reason for low self-perception is the concerns that obese individuals have about their weight (28). Emotions such as sadness, joy, and anger may alter eating habits, digestion, and feeling of hunger in obese and healthy-weight individuals. However, an association between stressed-related eating and increased body weight has been reported (29). Additionally, uncontrolled eating is strongly associated with obese status (30).

Individuals with a positive self-perception can communicate well with other people in their social lives and be more successful in their school or business lives, while those with a negative self-perception are often anxious, restless, and have lower self-confidence (27). Self-esteem is reflected in the behavior of individuals regarding how they perceive their abilities and self-worth at every stage of their life (31). Individuals with a strong sense of self can more easily transfer their talents to their social lives and be successful (31). Self-perception is a concept with many aspects, not only dependent on body weight but also determined emotionally, cognitively, and physically (32).

THE CONCEPT OF CYBERBULLYING AND CYBERVICTIMIZATION

Bullying committed online is referred to as "cyberbullying". Bullying of this nature is common on social media, messaging services, gaming platforms, and mobile devices. It is a pattern of behavior meant to frighten, enrage, or humiliate the targets. Examples include spreading false information about someone, publishing embarrassing pictures on social media, sending offensive or threatening messages on messaging apps, and sending hurtful messages to others while using another person's identity. It is to disturb, humiliate and gossip about other users through internet services, which began with the spread of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype. Cyberbullying is frequently seen in schools and has become an alarming behavioral disorder and problem in recent years (33). Threats to youth and adolescent health such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, anger, aggression, and addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, and other substances are shown to be directly or indirectly related to cyberbullying and victimization (9, 10, 34).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL BULLYING, CYBERBULLYING, CYBERVICTIMIZATION AND OBESITY

Cybercrime has two components: The bully and the victim. Victims may be passive or provocative. Provocative victims are those who are more likely to become bullies later in life. Some of the biggest consequences of internet addiction and cybercrime are physical diseases, especially obesity. Improper use of the internet may reduce the time devoted to sports, reading books, or engaging in different activities. Additionally, young individuals' health may be endangered by the occurrence of physical ailments. Using the computer obliquely for a long time may cause postural disorders. Looking at a screen for a prolonged time may cause eye problems, and being sedentary may lead to obesity, insomnia, circulatory problems, and financial problems. Such occurrences may disrupt one's business, academic and social life. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the use of the internet at the level of addiction may cause obesity (35). Overweight students being made fun of by their peers is a common occurrence in schools. In addition to peers, mocking coming from family members may cause emotional problems to increase. Being overweight can decrease

self-esteem, increase depression and even cause suicidal thoughts in adolescents (9). As cyberbullying is potentially more dangerous than traditional bullying in this era, problems faced by obese individuals may continue to increase in the near future (35). The severity of depressive symptoms observed in obese girls who had friends who consoled them, showed close attention, and emphasized their competence after being mistreated by their peers was lower than the severity of the depressive symptoms of obese girls who did not have friends to support them (28). Although the mitigating effect of social support was not observed in obese boys with depressive symptoms in the study, social support for individuals who were exposed to cyberbullying may reduce the psychological impact on individuals (9). In a study on the relationship between bullying and body weight, Griffiths et al. (36) reported that obese boys tend to engage in bullying more than normal-weight boys. Obese girls, on the other hand, are victims of bullying at a significantly higher rate than their normal-weighted peers (37). It was reported that boys who did not have normal weight (overweight, obese, and underweight) are victimized more often (37). Thirty percent of boys who are overweight and 31% of boys who are obese are victims of bullying (37). Twenty-three percent of school-age adolescents who had normal body weight were reported to be teased about their weight, while 17% of underweight students experienced weight teasing (38). Teenagers who are underweight, overweight, and obese are more likely to experience persistent bullying than their normal-weight peers (37, 38). For girls, looks and lack of close friends are the most common reasons for being bullied (36). It was stated that 25% of girls who were overweight and 34% of those who were obese were victims of bullying (36). Guo et al. (39) reported that overweight and obese children are particularly vulnerable to verbal bullying. In a study by Janssen et al. (40) examining the relationship between obesity and exposure to bullying with 5749 obese and overweight girls and boys in the 11-16 age group, it was seen that obese and overweight youth between the ages of 11-14 were victims of bullying more than those of normal weight. It has also been observed that people aged 15-16 are more often the bully than the victim. While girls used relational bullying such as exclusion and spreading untrue rumors, boys used both relational and overt bullying, including acts such as verbal-physical assault, name-calling, and teasing. In a study by Lee et al. (41), the effects of traditional bullying and cyberbullying on obese individuals were compared. The study indicated that while both cyberbullying and traditional bullying affected the relationship between BMI and psychological distress, only the effects of traditional bullying were significant. This may indicate that obese or overweight children who have been victims of traditional bullying are more likely to suffer from increased physical and psychological distress (4, 41). Teens who experienced cyberbullying were less likely to experience psychosocial distress compared to those who experienced traditional bullying (41, 42). One possible explanation is that people may engage in cyberbullying both as perpetrators and victims, as well as using aggressive behavior

as a coping or defense mechanism (43-45). Teenagers who had good self-control also displayed greater resilience and less distress against traditional bullying and cyberbullying (46). Furthermore, if victimization occurs in the virtual world, it might not always result in emotional distress (47). Given the distinctive features of online environments, it would make sense that obese or overweight victims could receive support from social media users, which could offset critical remarks from their peers during instances of weight-based cyberbullying (28, 48). An empathic audience might, for instance, oppose (rather than conforming to) the negative content that might be accompanied by the distress caused by others if it is directed at a teenager who receives a derogatory message or image about them being overweight. However, it cannot be stated that the children in the sample are "pure" victims (49, 50). Online bullying victims have the option to act aggressively toward their online bullies in order to enrage them, because physical dominance is often irrelevant in such interactions (50). Anderson et al. (51) examined cyberbullying and the reaction to it on Facebook and found that oppositional behavior in cases of weight-based cyberbullying can encourage onlookers to verbally support the victim. This result extends earlier research on the usefulness of oppositional behavior as a social form on the internet (3, 52-55). This study's evidence for the opposite effect has been proposed as a template for initiatives to prevent cyberbullying (56). Challenging the bully or supporting the victim has been defined as dissenting behavior by Anderson et al. (51). Men showing dissenting behavior were seen to make the most complimentary remarks and had the least negative impressions toward the victims. Bystanders who remained silent expressed more sympathy for the victim, and thought the victim was more "favorable" and "healthier" than those who made insulting comments. This indicates that while some passive bystanders appeared to disagree with the bullying, they did nothing to intervene or support the victim. Future interventions using dissenting viewpoint models for relational and verbal bullying may be more successful for all genders (51, 57). Another study by Marco and Tormo-Irun (58) examined the relationship between cyberbullying and eating disorders in adolescents. The study showed that cyber victimization correlated negatively with body image. Since body shape, size, and weight are the main targets of cyberbullying, insults and negative comments may lead to the development of negative body image in adolescents (59, 60). Additionally, eating disorders such as bulimia, binge eating disorder, or avoidant restrictive food intake disorder were positively correlated with cyber victimization (61). Understanding the effects of both offline and online victimization will help develop treatments for victims, given that adolescent obesity is linked to an increased risk of bullying victimization (45, 61, 62).

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying is a deliberate, repetitive, and damaging behavior for individuals or groups using communication technologies.

Easy access to the target individual, the anonymity of the cyberbully, and the lack of concepts such as time, space, and physical strength cause the number of cyberbullying victims to be higher than traditional bullying. The age group in which the relationship between body esteem and weight is most prominent is adolescents. Being overweight can decrease self-esteem, while increasing depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescents. Cyberbullying can be more dangerous than traditional bullying, and the relevant problems faced by obese individuals may increase in the near future. Obese individuals are more prone to be exposed to cyberbullying during school years and in adulthood. Obese girls are victims of bullying at a significantly higher rate than obese boys. Boys become victims when they are physically weak. Girls bully based on looks and lack of close friends, while boys bully using verbal and physical assault. Victims of online bullying are able to act aggressively toward their online bullies to enrage them because physical dominance is often irrelevant in such interactions. Various options such as social and professional help and support groups may prevent the damage to self-esteem in overweight and obese groups. Internet addiction and cyberbullying can be prevented by conscious internet use, informing children and adults, and parents monitoring their children's internet use during childhood and adolescence.

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