

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

A medicolegal perspective on the issue of cyberbullying in Turkey: A retrospective descriptive study on medical specialization theses

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Abstract

In recent years, the issue of cyberbullying has attracted the attention of researchers from many different fields as well as medical professionals. The aim of this study is to discuss the descriptive variables of medical specialty theses written on cyberbullying in Turkey in terms of forensic medicine. In this study, using the keywords “cyberbullying” and “cyber violence”, theses registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education were scanned. As a result of the screening, among 179 theses, 15 medical specialty theses related to the subject were examined within the scope of the study. The distribution of the 15 theses examined according to specialty areas was n:7 (46.6%) psychiatry, n:4 (26.6%) family medicine, n:1 (6.6%) forensic medicine, n:1 (6.6%) child and adolescent mental health and diseases, n:2 (13.3%) pediatrics. The peak in the writing of specialty theses was in 2019 (n:4). The population of the theses consisted of individuals aged 12-18 years in n:10 (66.6%) and 10-18 years in n:3 (20.0%) and university students in n:2 (13.3%), respectively. It was determined that questionnaires were used as the instrument and method in all of the theses analyzed. Most of the theses analyzed were conducted on adolescents between the ages of 12-18. There were no thesis studies among adults without or not a university degree. In future studies, these populations should also be examined. Due to its effects on people, it was thought that there may be an increase in the number of patients exposed to cyberbullying in the fields of psychiatry and forensic medicine. Therefore, it is necessary to increase medical awareness and conduct more studies on the cyberbullying issue.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, cyber violence, forensic medicine, psychiatry

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is the behavior of spreading rumors about another person, sharing inappropriate photos, or harming another person by using e-mail or other means of communication via mobile phone or the internet (Türk et al., 2021). For a behavior to be considered as cyberbullying: The behavior is expected to be planned and intentional, to be done more than once, to cause problems in the victim, and to be done through technological platforms (Hinduja et al., 2014). People who are subjected to cyberbullying are defined as cyber victims; people who commit cyberbullying are defined as cyber bullies; and people who watch the bullying act from the outside are defined as witnesses (Kavuk et al., 2018). Cyberbullying is observed as a behavior that is usually done in more than one way using communication technologies. Cyberbullying can be seen as teasing, online harassment, cyber harassment to create threat or fear, defamation, pretending to be someone else, exposing, exclusion, sexting, grieving, and trolling (Kowalski et al., 2012; Türk et al., 2021). The fact that it can be done in many and various ways makes it easier for the bully to engage in cyberbullying behavior at any time and place.

People can commit cyber violence or become victims of cyber violence in many different ways. Through *instant messaging applications with threatening and humiliating messages*, sharing private information with other people; through *e-mail applications by sending harmful e-mails that can make the victim a member of various pornographic and shopping sites*; through *forums or video viewing platforms such as YouTube by mocking, threatening, humiliating, targeting the opinions of other individuals in forums*; through *social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok by opening multiple accounts with secret identities, following the victim through these accounts, sending sexually explicit photos or messages, approaching the victim as a different person, and through voice conversations or in-game messaging through internet games* (Türk et al., 2021). As technology and social media platforms evolve, different

types and tools of cyberbullying may emerge.

In a study conducted by Huang et al. in Taiwan, it was reported that cyberbullying was 20.4% and cyber victimization was 34.9%; in a study conducted by Lee et al. in 2017 with 4000 adolescents in South Korea it was reported that 6.3% of the participants were cyberbullies, 14.6% were cyber victims, and 13.1% were both cyber bullies and victims (Huang et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2017). If we look at different studies conducted in the world, 23.8% of the participants in the study conducted by Mishna et al. in 2012 and 5% of the participants in the study conducted by Laftman et al. in 2013 were reported to be cyber victimized (Mishna et al., 2012; Laftman et al., 2013). When we look at the studies conducted in Turkey; in the study conducted by Dilmaç et al. in 2009 with 666 university students, it was stated that 55.3% of the participants were victims of cyberbullying at least once in their lives (Dilmaç et al., 2009). In Eroğlu's study conducted with 606 high school students in 2014, it was observed that 6.94% of the participants were victims of cyber violence and 63.68% of the participants were both cyber bullies and victims of cyber violence (Eroğlu, 2014). In the study conducted by Dursun et al. among 610 university students in 2020, 41.8% of the participants were exposed to cyberbullying, and in Öztürk's study conducted with university students in 2020, 59.7% of them were cyber-victims (Dursun et al., 2020; Öztürk, 2020).

In recent years, it is seen that cyberbullying has become an important problem both in Turkey and in the world with the development of technology, and the methods and prevalence of cyberbullying have increased. However, there are very few medical studies in the literature, and there is a research gap in examining the issue of cyberbullying from a medical-legal perspective. Therefore, the aim of this study is to discuss the descriptive variables of medical specialty theses on cyberbullying in Turkey in terms of forensic medicine.

2. METHOD

This study is a cross-sectional descriptive retrospective study. Ethical approval was not obtained because open sources were used. In this study, using the keywords "cyberbullying" and "cyber violence", theses registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education were scanned. Among a total of 179 specialty theses on cyberbullying and cyber violence, 15 theses written in the field of medical specialty were examined within the scope of the study. Statistical data were presented as number, percentage and mean values.

3. FINDINGS

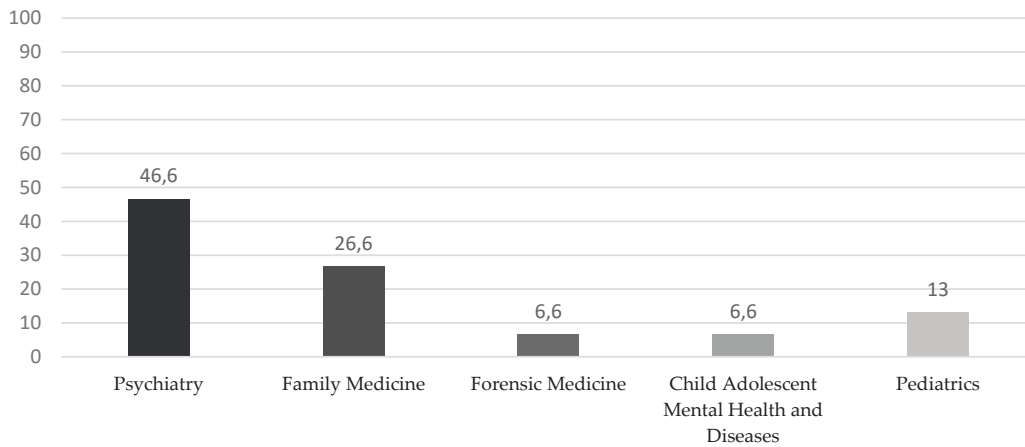
There were a total of 179 theses on cyberbullying and cyber violence, registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education and belonging to different fields. Of these, 144 (80.4%) were master's theses, 15 were medical specialty theses (8.3%) and 20 (11.1%)

were doctoral theses.

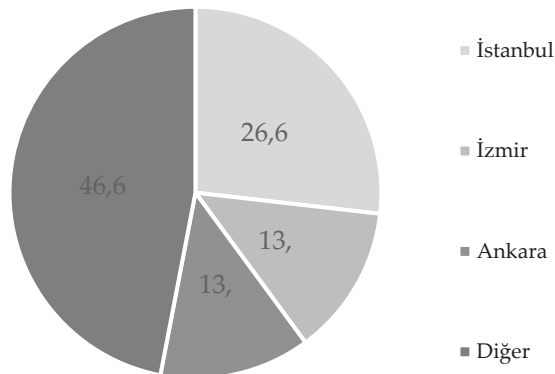
The age distribution in the reviewed medical specialty theses was 12-18 years in 10 theses (66.6%), 10-18 years in 3 theses (20.0%) and university students in the other 2 theses (13.3%). Descriptive findings such as age, gender and sample characteristics of the analyzed theses are shown in Table 1.

The distribution of the 13 theses according to the fields of medical specialization was as follows: 7 (46.6%) Psychiatry, 4 (26.6%) Family Medicine, 1 (6.6%) Forensic Medicine and 1 (6.6%) Child Psychiatry (Graphic 1).

When the distribution of the cities where the medical specialty theses were conducted was examined; n:4 (26.6%) Istanbul, n:2 (13.3%) Izmir, n:2 (13.3%) Ankara, n:2 (13.3%) Isparta and n:5 (33.3%) other cities (Sivas, Antalya, Konya, Edirne, Aydın) (Graphic 2).



Graphic 1. Medical Specialties



Graphic 2. Provinces where medical specialization thesis was made.

Table 1. Characteristics of the medical specialization theses reviewed

Author/Year	Title	Number of Population	Studied Population	Sex Male/Female	Mean age
Yücel Z., 2023	The relationship between school engagement and cyberbullying sensitivity among adolescents	103	Patients between the ages of 11-18	Male: 122 Female: 181	14,92±1,78
Eroğlu H., 2023	Examination of problematic internet use, social media addiction, self-esteem, internet gaming disorder, cyber bullying/victimization levels in adolescents diagnosed with obesity	164	Children and adolescents aged 12-18 years who were diagnosed with obesity in the Pediatric Endocrinology and healthy controls with normal weight range and did not have a known psychiatric diagnosis	Male: 49 Female: 115	15,23±1,579 15,69±1,661
Yerlikaya Oral E., 2022	Comparison between suicidal behavior disorder and non-suicidal self injury in terms of smartphone addiction risk and cyberbullying	102	Adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 who engage in self-harming behavior and those who do not	Male = 13 Female= 89	15,50±1,13 15,24±1,42 15,24±1,46
Firat E., 2022	Research of Internet Addiction, Peer-to-Peer Bullying and Cyberbullying Frequency in Adolescent Cases Diagnosed with Generalized Idiopathic Epilepsy	90	45 Generalized Adolescents diagnosed with idiopathic epilepsy and 45 healthy participants.	Male: 42 Female: 48	177,72±26,31 month
Ertürk B., 2022	Evaluation of the relationship between social anxiety levels and cyber bullying in adolescents with problems	378	9th-11th grade high school students	Male: 254 Female: 117	14,9 year
Yılmaz O., 2020	Determining the Relationship Between Cyberbullying Victimization and Depression Among Students Attending at Akdeniz University Medical Faculty	337	Students from 1 to 3 semesters studying at the medical faculty	Male: 160 Female: 177	20,01±1,39 year
Yılmaz HS., 2020	Partner cyber violence among university students evaluation	1097	1st - 6th year medical faculty students	Male: 554 Female: 540 Not Specified: 3	22,3±2,03 year
Durna S., 2019	Investigation of cyber bullying and victimization frequency and their relationship with anxiety and depression in high school students: a case of Konya	460	Ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th grade students who receive three different types of education: anatolian high school, private high school and imam hatip high school.	Male: 202 Female: 258	16-17 years

Table 1. (continues) Characteristics of the medical specialization theses reviewed

Tunçtürk M., 2019	Comparison of the adolescents with internet gaming disorder and problematic internet use in terms of parameters as cyber bullying, aggression and loneliness	124	Adolescents between the ages of 12-18 joined Internet Gaming Disorder group who met DSM 5 criteria for the disorder and who didn't meet DSM 5 criteria for the disorder	Male: 124 Female: 0	14,3 ± 1,7 year
Tetik S., 2019	Assesment of factors about cyberbullying among high school students in Edirne city center	2003	Male and female students aged 14 and over	Male: 965 Female: 1038	16±1,22 year
Göksu M., 2019	Relationship between social media attitudes and cyber bullying in depressed adolescents	104	53 female adolescents between the ages of 13-18 diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) and 51 healthy female adolescents matched with the case group in terms of age.	Male: 0 Female: 104	15,54±1,18 15,49±1,13
Özen E., 2018	The Determination of Psychiatric Comorbidity, Psychological Profile and Examination of the Relationship Between Problematic Internet Usage and Traditional-Cyber Bullying-Victimization in Adolescents with Cleft Lip and Palate	80	Adolescents diagnosed with cleft lip and palate and healthy adolescents aged 14-18	Male: 44 Female: 36	15,17±1,14 year
Yasin A., 2018	Evaluation of the relationship among pathological internet use, aggression and cyberbullying in children and adolescents	60	Among males aged 10-18, diagnosed with ADHD and those without any diagnosis	Male: 60 Female: 0	13,1±2 13,2±2
Kök BE., 2017	An Investigation of Cyber Bullying and Victimization in Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Prevalence and Associated Factors	92	Adolescents aged 12-18 diagnosed with ADHD	Male: 69 Female: 23	14,37±1,78 year
Aydın Görücü R., 2016	Investigation of Factors Associated with Cyber Bullying and Victimization among Children and Adolescents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	124	65 adolescents diagnosed with ADHD and 59 healthy individuals	Male: 96 Female: 28	14,06 ± 1,8 14,05 ± 1,9

When the distribution of theses according to years was analyzed, it was seen that most medical specialty theses were written in 2019 (n: 4, 26.6%). The first cyberbullying/violence medical specialty was conducted in 2016. In 2021, after the pandemic, there was no thesis on this subject. Finally, n:2 (13.3%) theses were written in 2023. It was found that questionnaires and scales were used as instruments and methods in all of the theses analyzed. All theses included descriptive questions inquiring sociodemographic characteristics. Among the scales used were; Affective disorders and schizophrenia interview schedule for school-age children with family-now and lifelong form in 7 theses, Cyberbullying Scale in 6 theses, Internet Addiction Scales in 5 theses, Revised Cyberbullying Inventory-II in 3 theses, Cyber Victimization Scale in 4 theses, and school engagement scale in 1 thesis. Among the sample groups in the medical specialty theses, there were adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in 3 theses, adolescents with internet gaming disorder/problematic internet use in 2 theses, adolescents with depressive symptoms in 2 theses, adolescents with obesity in 1 thesis, and adolescents with cleft palate-lip and psychiatric comorbidity in 1 thesis. Among the topics in the theses examined; comparison of adolescents with and without suicidal behavior disorder in terms of cyberbullying, cyberbullying frequency in adolescents with generalized idiopathic epilepsy, cyberbullying frequency in medical school students, partner cyber violence among medical school students, cyberbullying factors in high school students, the relationship between school engagement and cyberbullying susceptibility in adolescents.

4. DISCUSSION

With the increase in internet usage time, people have started to use the virtual environment more to establish friendships. The use of the Internet as a means of socialization through instant messaging, e-mail, social media platforms such as Twitter, Tiktok, chat rooms, and internet games has made the virtual environment a clear threat to cyberbullying (Yılmaz, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study focusing on cyberbullying-themed medical specialty theses

in Turkey. It was found that the first medical specialty thesis on cyber violence was written in 2016. In the following years, medical interest in cyberbullying increased and the number of specialty theses increased. It was found that the highest number of theses were written in the specialty of Psychiatry. It was thought that the fact that many psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety, high anxiety level, decrease in school and academic achievement, problems in peer and family relationships, which affect the person negatively for a long time, were seen in victims of cyber violence may have an effect on the fact that more theses were written in this field. In the literature, no medical specialty thesis written in English in a country other than Turkey was found; however, there were a few non-medical theses on cyberbullying in the workplace. There are studies on cyberbullying in different medical specialties other than specialty theses.

When the age range of the participants in the analyzed theses was evaluated, it was seen that the most common age range was 12-18 years old, and in 2 theses, research was conducted on university students. It was thought that more studies were conducted on this age group because adolescents are more vulnerable to being both victims of cyber violence and cyberbullies because they are impulsive due to their age, are prone to risky behaviors, want to prove themselves to their peers, and use social media for longer periods of time to establish relationships with their friends. In Durna's (2019) study titled "Examining the frequency of cyberbullying and cyber victimization in high school students and their relationship with anxiety and depression: The case of Konya", a total of 460 students consisting of 10th-11th-12th grade students were included in the study. In the study, it was stated that most of the messages were exchanged via social networks (50 messages per day on average), 55.7% (n:256) of the students had no internet control, 58.7% (n:270) were victims, and 24.5% (n:112) were both bullies and victims. In Eroğlu's study conducted with high school students in 2014, it was observed that 6.94% of the participants were victims of cyber violence and 63.68% of the participants were both cyber bullies

and victims of cyber violence (Eroğlu, 2014). In Durna's (2019) study, it was found that 4.3% (n: 20) of the students frequently experienced victimization in the form of hearing rude words by another child online, and there was a positive correlation between cyber victimization score and anxiety and depression risk. In Tetik's (2019) medical specialty thesis titled "Evaluation of cyberbullying and related factors in high school students in the center of Edirne", 2003 high school students were surveyed using the cyberbullying scale. In the study; determining the cyberbullying levels of students and evaluating the factors related to sociodemographic factors, mother/father education level, computer/tablet/mobile phone ownership status, time spent on the internet per day, family attitude, parental supervision of internet use, frequency of social media use and cyberbullying levels; age, gender, grade, school type, smoking/alcohol/substance use, involvement in family decisions, perceived school achievement, friendships, daily internet usage time, reaction to injustice, desire for revenge, acceptance of friendship requests from strangers, family attitude, frequency of social media use, membership name used in social media, parental supervision of internet use and cyberbullying. These studies show that being an adolescent is a risk factor for cyberbullying.

Regarding the theses conducted among university students examined within the scope of this study, it was considered to be important because it showed that adults were also exposed to cyber violence and they had difficulty in telling others about the events they were exposed to due to social pressures. In Yılmaz's (2020) medical specialty thesis titled "Evaluation of partner cyber violence among university students", a questionnaire was applied to 1st-6th grade medical faculty students in the EÜTF 2018-2019 academic year. In the study, it was stated that 88.6% of the participants used the internet for communication purposes, 93.7% of them had a social media account and used this account an average of 15.2 times a day, 23.5% of the students who stated that they had at least one partner so far were exposed to partner cyber violence at least once, and the most common type was "sending insulting messages". In the study, it was stated

that the victimization of partner cyber violence was negatively correlated with the level of self-esteem, the number of daily access to social media and the number of hours logged in daily, exposure to any partner violence, the number of partners, and exposure to cyber violence increased in direct proportion, the most common effect seen in victims after partner cyber violence was "anger", and 39. %9of the victims' academic achievement was negatively affected. For these reasons, it was thought that there is a need for research on cyberbullying among university students.

When the sample groups of the theses were examined, it was determined that most studies were conducted on Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. The second most common topics were internet gaming disorder and problematic internet use. In addition, it was seen that scales related to cyberbullying and internet addiction were more preferred in theses. The fact that children's internet use is left excessively free by their families, the lack of supervision of gaming environments and the ease of insulting, humiliating and mocking behaviors using anonymous accounts have an important place among the causes of cyber violence exposure. Therefore, these groups and their possible problems should be emphasized. It is predicted that the number of people exposed to cyber violence will increase even more with the development of technology in the future. People may come to us as patients due to both psychiatric problems and forensic requirements. These patients should be evaluated by physicians and more studies should be conducted on patient management. In Kök's (2017) study titled "Prevalence and Predictors of Cyberbullying and Victimization in Adolescents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder", a study was conducted with 92 adolescents between the ages of 12-18. The Revised Cyberbullying Inventory-II, Turgay DSM-IV Based Disruptive Behavior Disorders Symptom Screening Scale and Family Internet Use Control and Follow-up Form were completed by the volunteers and their families. The frequencies of cyberbully, victim and bully/victim were found to be 35.9%, 38.0% and 23.9% respectively in adolescents diagnosed with

ADHD, there was no difference in the number of psychiatric comorbidities between the presence/absence of cyberbullying and victimization, social anxiety disorder was found more frequently in cyber-victims, ADHD symptom severity of cyberbullies was significantly higher than non-bullies, and cyberbullies hid their identities more frequently during chatting. As a result of our study, in line with the literature, it can be said that adolescents are more aware of the cyber violence they are exposed to.

5. CONCLUSION

Rapid technological development and widespread use of social media lead to an increase in cyber violence. Most of the medical specialty theses on cyberbullying were conducted on adolescents between the ages of 12-18. There are fewer theses conducted among university students; this group should be investigated more widely. It would also be useful to study post-university and older age groups, for example, to examine the problem of cyberbullying in the workplace. The number of cyberbullying patients is expected to increase in the fields of psychiatry and forensic medicine as it has a great impact on the lives of individuals. Therefore, in order to develop a proper medical-legal approach to these patients, it is necessary to raise awareness and conduct more studies on this issue.

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