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Shaping Resilience Against Cyberbullying Through Social Skills Training

Kształowanie odporności na cyberprzemoc
poprzez trening umiejętności społecznych

ABSTRACT

The article aims to present findings on strengthening resilience in the context of cyberbullying through social skills training. The following categories are considered: cyberbullying, resilience, and social skills training. The essay begins by presenting the essence and scale of the cyberbullying phenomenon and the characteristics of resilience as a resource in the event of a cyberbullying threat. Other issues presented in the text are related to preventing cyberbullying and the characteristics of social skills training. The final part of the study is devoted to identifying the areas of social skills that are key to building resilience in the event of being involved in cyberbullying. Based on the analysis of research reports, the key role of self-awareness, working on emotions, empathy and perspective-taking in building resistance to cyberbullying and its effects should be indicated. The text also contains suggestions for the key elements of social skills training in educational practice, especially in the context of cyberbullying prevention.

KEYWORDS

resilience,
cyberbullying, social
skills training, youth,
shaping resilience

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

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ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie ustaleń dotyczących wzmacniania odporności w kontekście cyberprzemocy poprzez trening umiejętności społecznych. Przedmiotem namysłu są następujące kategorie: cyberprzemoc, odporność oraz trening umiejętności społecznych. Wywód rozpoczyna się od prezentacji istoty zjawiska cyberbullyingu i jego skali oraz charakterystyki rezyliencji jako zasobu w sytuacji zagrożenia cyberbullyingiem. Kolejnymi zagadnieniami prezentowanymi w tekście są kwestie dotyczące prewencji cyberbullyingu i charakterystyki treningu umiejętności społecznych. Końcowa część opracowania poświęcona jest wskazaniu obszarów umiejętności społecznych kluczowych dla budowania odporności w sytuacji bycia zaangażowanym w cyberbullying. Na podstawie analizy doniesień badawczych wskazać należy na kluczową rolę: samoświadomości, pracy nad emocjami, empatii i przyjmowania perspektywy w budowaniu odporności wobec cyberbullyingu i jego skutków. Tekst zawiera także propozycje wskazań kluczowych w praktyce edukacyjnej elementów treningu umiejętności społecznych, zwłaszcza w kontekście profilaktyki cyberbullyingu.

Introduction

These days, one has to face many challenges. Dynamism related to a number of technological changes (practically universal access to the internet and rapidly developing artificial intelligence) or to global security (the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing military conflicts, and cyberterrorism) are not unrelated to human well-being. The dynamics of large-scale societal changes also entails changing interpersonal relations. One such change that has emerged with the development of new communication technologies (mobile phone, the internet, and social media) is cyberbullying. The purpose of this text is to characterize the possibility of strengthening resilience in the face of cyberbullying through social skills training. The text presents theoretical issues related to cyberbullying and resilience as a disposition that allows one to deal with online violence. This reflection will also refer to social skills training as an essential element of strengthening resilience in the context of cyberbullying. Issues related to cyberbullying and its scale are addressed, the understanding of the concept of resilience are adopted as a framework, and issues regarding social skills are

characterized. The final part of the text is dedicated to those social skills that are crucial for building resilience in the face of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying and Its Scale

Dan Olweus' works on traditional peer violence contribute to the reflection on the phenomenon of cyberbullying. The traditional understanding of bullying according to Dan Olweus includes saying mean or hurtful things, calling someone names, ignoring or excluding them from a group, hitting, kicking, pushing, or beating them, telling lies, spreading rumors, or contributing to these actions. The characteristics of bullying include intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power (Olweus 2013). This understanding of peer aggression has become the basis for defining cyberbullying as a form of violent behavior that is mediated by the use of modern technologies.

The term *cyberbullying*, first used by Bill Belsey in 2004, was defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or a group intended to cause harm to others. According to Dorota Siemienicka, Małgorzata Skibińska, and Kamila Majewska, cyberbullying is most often treated as a type of traditional violence (bullying), the purpose of which is to intentionally harm a weaker person, but this violence uses tools of information and communication technology. Not every violent act carried out with digital tools can be considered cyberbullying. Although many negative phenomena in cyberspace are inter-related and have negative effects, they differ from each other—especially in relation to power imbalances and the desire to cause harm. In the digital environment, a distinction is made between cyberbullying and cyberaggression. Cyber-aggression refers to intentional actions taken to harm others through the use of technology. However, these actions do not include the imbalance of power or repetition characteristic of cyberbullying. Some researchers also distinguish cyber-rudeness and cyber-incivility. These terms encompass rude, impolite behaviors that occur through information and communication technologies, i.e., e-mails or text messages. Despite the fact that these behaviors are deviant, aggressive, and harmful and violate the norms of mutual respect, they are characterized by low intensity and ambiguous intention to harm the victim (Siemienicka et al. 2020).

According to experts Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin, cyberbullying is “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronics devices” (Hinduja, Patchin 2014: 11). These definitions include some keywords, which are inherent in cyberbullying and show that it is *willful* (the behavior has to be deliberate, not accidental) and *repeated* (bullying reflects a pattern of behavior, not just one isolated incident), causes *harm* (the target must perceive that harm was inflicted), and involves computers, cell phones, and other *electronic devices* (this is what differentiates cyberbullying from traditional bullying). Cyberbullying is also called “cyber-aggression, electronic bullying, e-bullying, cyber harassment, text bullying, SMS bullying, mobile bullying, digital bullying, [or] internet bullying” (Hinduja, Patchin 2014: 15).

Jacek Pyżalski, a leading Polish researcher of violence in the virtual realm, states that the concept of electronic aggression applies to all acts of aggression carried out using mobile phones or the internet. Pyżalski categorizes electronic aggression according to the type of victim. Therefore, we can distinguish electronic aggression against an injured person, where the victim is weaker than the perpetrator, e.g., an alcoholic or a homeless person. Another type of aggression is electronic aggression against celebrities. Next, Pyżalski lists electronic bias bullying, directed not at a specific person, but at groups of people, e.g., of a specific nationality or sexual orientation. Another type of aggression is electronic aggression toward strangers, chosen at random while using the internet. Pyżalski also distinguishes electronic mobbing, where the victim belongs to a group of which the perpetrator is also a member (Pyżalski 2011).

According to Łukasz Wojtasik, the following types of cyberbullying can be distinguished: verbal violence via the internet and mobile phones, humiliation and ridicule, intimidation and blackmail, the publication of compromising materials on the internet, and identity theft and impersonation (Wojtasik 2007).

Pyżalski, on the other hand, points to such types of cyberbullying as insults and name-calling in online games; intentional, unpleasant, ridiculing, or threatening comments in online forums; insults during conversations in online chats; malicious comments on social media, malicious, offensive, or threatening messages via instant messaging; offensive, intimidating messages via SMS; intentional exclusion from

a group of friends or communities on social media; fake accounts to ridicule the victim; virus-infected messages; and online lies to annoy or intimidate another person (Pyżalski 2011).

According to Scott Tobias and Taylor Chapanar, “there are some factors that may involve young people in cyberaggression. One of those factors which may engage a youngster in cyberbullying rather than traditional violence, as traditional bullying, is that the interaction between victim and perpetrator is not face to face.” As the authors point out, “cyberbullying combines both the anonymity of indirect bullying as well as the targeted attack seen with direct bullying” (Tobias, Chapanar 2016: 9). Moreover, according to them, 5% to 10% of students had been victims of cyberbullying in their last years spent at school (Tobias, Chapanar 2016).

As Arzu Caliskan Demir and Yunus Emre Donmez said, general bullying behaviors (including cyberbullying) were lowest in Wales (13% of girls and 28% of boys were involved in bullying) and highest in Greenland (67% of girls and 78% of boys). Moreover, in a study conducted in the USA, 59% of young people between 13–17 years of age experienced cyberbullying as a perpetrator or victim (Demir, Donmez 2022).

According to the research of Dóra Eszter Várnai and colleagues, cyberbullying is also a serious problem in post-communist countries. In Poland, 16.25% of pupils 10 to 17 years old cyberbullied others (Hungary: 12.82%, Slovakia: 9.52%, and Czechia: 7.36%). Additionally, 18.72% of young Poles have been cyberbullied by others (Hungary: 18.13%, Slovakia: 11.15%, and Czechia: 10.44%) (Várnai et al. 2022).

Interesting results are also provided by the research conducted by Jacek Pyżalski in 2012 among 15-year-olds living in Łódź and its vicinity. Within the past year, 66% of the respondents had experienced various types of electronic aggression, but only 25% of them had experienced repetitive behavior. Aggressors more often attacked people they knew only online, not people from their social environment. Almost 17% of the surveyed aggressors indicated that they insulted their former partner online. One in four aggressors insulted random people online, while another 16% indicated that their victims were members of various groups: fans of a certain band or football team, celebrities, or socially excluded people (e.g., the homeless

or addicts). Young people showed the lowest degree of online aggression toward teachers (Pyżalski 2012).

Another relationship revealed in the research was that between the types of electronic aggression and the gender of the respondents. First of all, boys are more likely than girls to be perpetrators of cyberbullying and, compared to girls, are more likely to attack random people, socially excluded people, members of various groups, and teachers. Girls, on the other hand, more often attacked their former partners or people known to them only via the internet. Among the youths surveyed by Pyżalski, 74.4% were perpetrators of cyberbullying; in this group 4.9% committed cyberbullying more than four times a year (Pyżalski 2012).

Interesting data on the scale of cyberbullying in Poland is also provided by a report on the mental health of young people, called “Young Heads” and published by the Unaweza Foundation. According to them,

in the last year, almost 2/3 of young people between 10 and 19 years of age (60.9%) declared that they had experienced hate speech in the last year, and more than half of the respondents had experienced hate speech in the last month (50.2%). Statistical analysis showed that this form of online violence is most often experienced by people who described their gender as different (70% in the last year and 61.3% in the last month), and women relatively least often experience hate (55.3% in the last year and 42.9% in the last month. (Flis, Dębski 2023: 72)

Moreover, one in three students hates others.

Resilience and Difficulties in Defining the Concept

The concept of resilience comes from research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. It was then that pioneering research on children suffering from mental illnesses appeared. Understanding the causes of these illnesses led to the search for risk factors affecting the appearance of mental health disorders in children. Resilience includes attempts to explain the phenomenon of positive adaptation of children and adolescents exposed to various types of adversity or trauma. It refers to a relatively good adaptation to life despite the threats one experiences (Bzymek 2020).

It is very difficult to find a Polish equivalent for the term *resilience*. Wioletta Junik made an attempt to put this issue in order. In her list of possible terms to describe resilience, she evokes such synonyms as flexible, springy, plastic, stretchy, extensible, durable, and resourceful. The research in the area of resilience includes concepts referring to the characteristics of the subject (ego-resilience); the personality elements of resilience; the ability of the individual to cope with stress; their sustainable resources, knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and satisfying social ties that are also a source of positive emotions. The interactive nature of resilience assumes the coexistence of risk factors and protective factors. The result is an interaction of features, competences, and external factors—including both protective and risk factors. It is worth noting the problem of imprecise definitions for resilience, which is very often referred to as *flexibility* in the Polish academic literature. Wioletta Junik points out that this interferes with the correct interpretation of research results. Thus, it has been suggested to create indexes of risk factors and protective factors from research on children and adolescents, which can defend against interpretation errors by analyzing the relationships between individual factors and problem behaviors and by analyzing general constructs regarding the total burden of an individual with such risk and protection (Junik 2011).

The term resilience itself comes from the Latin words *salire* (springing or arising) and *resilire* (recovering or returning to a previous state). In Polish, we cannot find the term resilience. The closest to the existing concept can be such words as flexibility, resistance, or ability to regenerate forces. Initially present in physics, the term for the ability of a material to return to its original form after distortion has spread to wider circles. In the social sciences, the term came into being thanks to Emma Werner's pioneering research on the development of children and adolescents in disadvantaged living conditions. Based on the results of Werner's research, it can be assumed that resilience means a certain kind of efficiency in functioning under difficult conditions or in difficult periods of one's life, but also having skills appropriate to one's age and developing despite adversity. In a broader sense, resilience is a dynamic process that reflects relatively good adaptation despite threats or traumas (Bzymek 2020).

Another meaning attributed to the concept of resilience is bouncing off the bottom, reaching mental health and relatively good functioning after experiencing a highly stressful life event or trauma. It is important that resilience in this sense is not synonymous with good mental health or high social competences, because it takes into account exposure to a number of threatening factors and relatively good mental health of the individual, despite the impact from these factors. Moreover, the interactive nature of resilience should be taken into account. In this sense, the emphasis is on a person's contact with a number of serious factors that threaten their functioning, while they maintain relatively good mental health despite the presence and influence of these factors (Bzymek 2020).

According to Krzysztof Szwejca, the concept of resilience attempts to explain what it means to effectively face adversity and traumatic events. It is understood as "a dynamic process reflecting a relatively good adaptation of an individual despite the threats or traumatic experiences they undergo" (Szwejca 2014: 563). According to him, the main emphasis in this definition is the fact that most victims cope with the consequences of trauma on their own and with the help of a social network; they recover quickly, stay healthy, properly carry out developmental tasks, and function efficiently in life (Szwejca 2014).

In the social sciences, the term resilience is used to describe the process of overcoming negative life events, leading to a relatively good adaptation of the individual despite threats or traumatic experiences in childhood. Resiliency, on the other hand, refers to a property, personality trait, or relatively permanent resource of an individual (Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta 2018).

In the early 1950s, Jeanne and Jack Block introduced the concept of ego-resilience. It refers to a characteristic of an individual, to those personality traits that are expressed by bravery in overcoming difficulties and solving problems, as well as the ability to adapt to different living conditions. Ego-resilience is a personality trait that can occur unrelated to difficult life events. However, according to some researchers, this term should not be used in the context of resilience, because using it to describe a person's traits may involve assigning responsibility for whether and how they coped with a highly stressful

situation. If they fail to cope, the person is blamed for the failure (Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta 2018).

Edith Grotberg defines resilience as “a universal ability that enables a person, group, or community to prevent, minimize, or overcome the damaging effects of adversity” (Grotberg 2000: 14). This universality raised by Grotberg is very important when dealing with cyberbullying, if only because of its prevalence. Anna Kołodziej-Zaleska and Hanna Przybyła-Basista (2018) describe resilience differently. For them, resilience is understood as a dynamic process involving positive adaptation in unfavorable conditions. It is also a relatively permanent disposition of an individual that determines their process of adaptation to stressful events. Moreover, resilience is considered and defined in the context of chronic stress; it is recognized as a process related to the ability to endure and cope with existing or recurring demands and the ability to maintain healthy functioning in various areas of life. Auxiliary processes in the resilience process include personal resources and personality traits, self and ego-related resources, interpersonal and social resources, worldviews, beliefs and values, behavioral and cognitive skills, and other resources.

Zygryd Juczyński and Nina Ogińska-Bulik suggest perceiving resilience as the ability to overcome the effects of negative phenomena and life events. As the authors indicate, effective ways of coping with stress in people endowed with the trait of resilience results from strategies associated with positive emotions (such as focusing on a task, giving a positive meaning to ordinary events, or positively re-evaluating a situation). They are also more likely to use problem-focused strategies and less likely to use emotional and avoidance techniques. The role of resilience has been shown by research on occupational burnout. Resilience differentiates people in terms of occupational burnout syndrome. In their research, they showed that women with a high level of resilience experienced significantly less depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. The higher the respondents' resilience, the less likely they were to suffer burnout. Likewise, in studies on compulsive overeating, the results indicate that people who compulsively eat were characterized by low resilience. Developing resilience and other personal and social resources can help reduce obesity (Ogińska-Bulik, Juczyński 2011).

As Natalia Maj and Tomasz Piątek note, resilience is a person's ability to adapt to life in the context of tragedy, trauma, and other significant difficulties. This is an ability to cope with many different significant ongoing difficulties. It is a skill that is connected with many different behaviors, completely ordinary ones that can be learned; hence the postulate that resilience can be shaped. This is particularly important in the face of new, unpredictable threats that may affect large numbers of people (e.g., terrorism). However, "teaching resilience" turns out to be difficult due to individual differences in the ways this feature is built and the multidimensionality of resilience. However, building resilience in people can prevent stress to some extent. It is safe to say that such an approach to resilience allows us to think of this feature as a resource in proactive coping, which is aimed precisely at future, unexpected events (Maj, Piątkowski 2021).

For the author of this study, resilience means the ability to cope with difficult situations, using one's own emotional and social resources. It is also an acquired, learned skill that can be developed and supported in the course of one's life. Accepting the understanding of resilience proposed by Emmy Werner (Bzymek 2020), resilience is treated as a skill that can be developed and is a disposition for coping with difficult situations. Following this understanding of resilience, the author of the study believes that this ability is particularly valuable when struggling with the challenges of modern times, for example, the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

Resilience as a Resource When Engaging in Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a widespread phenomenon. Research carried out in 2010 by the Cyberbullying Research Center shows that girls are much more likely to experience cyberbullying; they do not "get along" with others and are perceived as irritating, provoking, or inhibiting others. However, even if a child has these risk factors, it does not mean that they will be bullied in the future. There are two types of children who are more likely to bully. Some are well-adjusted to their peers, have strong social relationships, are intensely focused on their popularity, and want to dominate or be responsible for others. Others are more isolated from their peers and may suffer from depression or anxiety, have low self-esteem, are less involved in school life, give in

easily to peer pressure, or do not empathically identify with the emotions and feelings of others (Willard 2007).

The research of Donna Dooley and her team indicates that most often the perpetrators of cyberbullying are young people who are aggressive or easily frustrated, have parents who are less involved and concerned about the fate of their children, think badly of others, have difficulties respecting social norms and rules, evaluate violence positively, perform poorer than average at school, and have friends and classmates who bully others and do not feel an emotional connection with the school environment (Dooley et al. 2009). As Philip Ryan points out, the perpetrators of cyberbullying are characterized by a low level of social competence, especially in the area of interpersonal communication. Moreover, perpetrators who do not face appropriate consequences for their aggressive online behavior are much more likely to experience long-term problems at school and in interpersonal relationships and to come into conflict with the law. Unfortunately, many perpetrators of cyberbullying fall victim to aggression from parents, siblings, or peers from outside the school environment. Due to the fact that they experience humiliation themselves, they develop negative emotions and low self-esteem. On the basis of these negative personal experiences, cyberbullying becomes a way of discharging their own negative emotions in an action that harms others. For the perpetrator, it is a way of coping with the feelings of powerlessness and humiliation they experience as victims. In this way, a vicious circle of violence is created, in which the original victim becomes the secondary perpetrator. The perpetrator of cyberbullying can be a complete stranger, residing in a distant city or even in another country (Ryan 2012).

Typically, children who are victims of cyberbullying have one or more of the following risk factors: they are perceived as different from their peers by virtue of being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses, wearing out-of-fashion clothing, being new to the school, or not being associated with a particular group. In the perception of their peers, they are considered weak and unable to defend themselves. They are also characterized by low self-esteem, heightened feelings of anxiety and fear, or depressive disorders. Children at risk of being a victim of cyberbullying are also less popular than their peers and have few friends (Waligóra-Huk 2014).

Kamila Knol-Michałowska also analyzed the nature of a third group of people involved in cyberbullying: its witnesses. They can take several positions in the face of electronic violence: from joining the perpetrator, though not by directly attacking the victim but by strengthening the perpetrator (e.g., laughing or liking), which encourages the perpetrator to continue. Other roles that witnesses of cyberbullying can take include giving neither a positive or negative response, but through their passivity giving the perpetrator silent permission. The last role is standing with the victim and, by defending them, stopping the cyber offender. What Knol-Michałowska puts special emphasis on is the fact that the invisible audience is a huge group of people who can play a positive role in stopping cyberbullying, providing support for the victim, and disciplining the perpetrator (Knol-Michałowska 2013). The experience of cyberbullying has numerous consequences and leads to the degradation of mental health. The effects of cyberbullying include higher anxiety and sadness, a significant decrease in self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, and self-harm. Consequences related to withdrawal from social activities are also noticeable: resistance to school combined with truancy, lower school performance and a willingness to drop out of school, and withdrawing from existing peer relationships. Among the consequences, there are also those of a psychosomatic nature, such as a decrease in psychomotor activity, sleep and appetite disorders, and stress-induced abdominal pain (Ryan 2012). The prevalence and effects of cyberbullying force us to reflect on its prevention. Researchers, such as Hinduja and Patchin, indicate that one factor that may help in dealing with cyberbullying is resilience. Hinduja and Patchin found that students with higher levels of resilience were less likely to report online victimization and that among those who did, resilience acted as a buffer, hindering its negative effects at school (Hinduja Patchin 2017).

In a study by David Santos and colleagues on a group of Spanish youths (12 to 17 years old), it was found that

higher levels of resilience were related to fewer depression symptoms and greater satisfaction with life. These results indicate that typical components of resilience, such as social competence, family cohesion, and goal orientation, are associated with better psychological adjustment. More importantly, resilience was shown to be a buffering variable in the

relationship of cyberbullying with depression symptoms and life satisfaction. The relationship between being a victim of cyberbullying and depression was weaker among adolescents with a higher level of resilience. (Santos et al. 2021: 418–419)

Moreover, there is a significant relationship between cyberbullying and life satisfaction among adolescents. The relationship between being a victim of cyberbullying and lower satisfaction in life was weaker among those adolescents with higher levels of resilience—although cyberbullying was associated with less satisfaction in life, high levels of resilience weakened this relationship. These results indicate that “resilience is an important protective factor against the potential negative consequences of cyberbullying, including more depression symptoms and less satisfaction with life” (Santos et al. 2021: 420).

According to Silvia Gabrielli and colleagues, resilience can be a protective factor to help young people cope with bullying and cyberbullying. Certain components of resilience, such as levels of optimism, self-efficacy, adaptability, tolerance, and sensitivity, decrease the probability of students being victimized (Gabrielli et al. 2021).

Preventing Cyberbullying

Wioletta Wróbel-Delegacz, when talking about preventing negative phenomena on the internet, refers to the role that education should play. Due to the threats associated with cyberspace, she distinguishes several functions of education. The first one is the educational and socializing role, which aims to ensure cultural, axiological, linguistic, and moral continuity. Another function is caring. It can ensure the safety of members of society, especially those vulnerable to threats in the world of information technology. The emotional/sexual function is designed to provide children with emotional support and to satisfy their needs for love, so that they do not have to look for fulfillment of these needs in the virtual world. The integration and control function is designed to control the activities of all members of society, checking which websites children visit, which applications they use, blocking websites with dangerous and harmful content, and organizing children’s time in accordance with generally accepted rules of conduct. The recreational and social role consists in organizing free

time, entertainment, and relaxation, as well as introducing children to social relations in the real world (Wróbel-Delegacz 2019).

It is also worth paying attention to the issues indicated by young people in relation to assistance activities. Based on research by Julia Barlińska and colleagues, it can be seen that what young people who experience cyberbullying pay attention to is the lack of sufficient support from teachers. According to young people, they do not treat reports of such events seriously enough and their help or advice, also for young people, is insufficient. Young people emphasize that they expect assistance programs not to “threaten them with the internet,” but to indicate specific actions for what should be done in a difficult situation. They express a need to learn how to deal with a situation when they become a victim of cyberbullying and how to assess whether a given event is cyberbullying or not. Young people also stressed the lack of clear rules and expectations toward them in terms of how they use the internet at school and at home and issues surrounding helping their parents understand the rules of the virtual world (Barlińska et al. 2018).

Young people also emphasize the fact that adults do not know what young people consider the most severe manifestations of online aggression: the public nature of acts of violence, their duration, and the characteristics of the perpetrators’ actions. They also indicate cases of cyberbullying as a painful issue, related to the dynamics of their love relationships. According to the findings of Barlińska and colleagues, a common act of cyberbullying is the dissemination of erotic photos, e.g., when there is a breakup or one of the partners does not reciprocate the other’s feelings (*ibidem*).

Łukasz Tomczyk and Łukasz Srokowski indicate that the most important preventive action is education in the field of social values and skills. Elements specifically relating to the use of mobile phones and the internet should also be added to this. Children and young people should acquire appropriate skills in the use of digital technology and should learn the advantages of electronic communication devices, the potential dangers associated with their use, and ways to prevent these dangers. Training in these areas should be the responsibility of schools, families, and society (Tomczyk, Srokowski 2016).

As noted by Leen d’Haenens and colleagues, strategies for dealing with cyberbullying should focus on increasing the victim’s social,

communication, and digital competences and resilience. Resilience is the ability to deal with negative experiences online or offline. According to researchers, online resilience means being equipped with the ability to deal with negative online experiences through active problem-solving, not passivity, avoidance, or even retaliation against the perpetrator (d'Haenens et al. 2013).

Characteristics of Social Skills Training

To paraphrase the title of one of Elliott Aronson's flagship works, it should be pointed out that a human is a social being. What makes people differ in terms of the ability to establish and maintain relationships with others, and to derive satisfaction from them, is the level of social skills. Anna Matczak defines social skills as "complex skills determining the effectiveness of coping in a specific type of social situation, acquired by an individual in the course of social training" (Matczak 2007: 7). Depending on the developmental period, other tasks related to the emotional and social sphere are set for a person. From the point of view of the issues raised in this text, it is important to look at social development at the stages of younger school age, middle school age, and teenage years.

What is particularly important in the social and emotional sphere for the younger school age is the increasing awareness of their roles. The child begins to be more aware of their place in the group and learns to manage their own behavior in order to regulate relationships with their peers. There is also an increasingly better understanding of social norms. At this stage of development, the child's self-esteem is also shaped by experiences and expectations from their social environment (parents, teachers, and peers) (Kamza 2014).

In the middle school age (10–13 years), due to the change in the approach to teaching (a departure from integrated teaching in favor of a subject system and assessment expressed in grades, which starts from the fourth year of elementary school), some children may experience difficulties independently planning their learning or difficulties with social adjustment. During this developmental period, it is important to support the ability to cooperate with others and nurture a sense of competence (including agency and emotional resistance to failure) and self-esteem (Domagała-Zyśk et al. 2017).

Puberty may occur at a slightly different time for each young person. According to the periodization adopted in textbooks of developmental psychology, the beginning of adolescence is usually considered to be the age of 11–12. During this period, apart from dynamic changes in physical appearance, there are also dynamic changes in the mental and social functioning of young people. The key task is to build one's own identity. This period is characterized by disintegration consisting in an internal conflict between the need for closeness and the need for independence, being a child and being an adult, and loyalty to adults. Emotional lability and a sense of ambivalence are also characteristic of this period. At the end of puberty, around the age of 20, a young person should reach a period of stability and increased self-confidence. Adolescence is also a time of youthful idealism and radicalization of thinking. Only what seems logical to a young person is right for them. A young person feels that others, especially the elderly, are wrong and do not understand reality (Piotrowski et al. 2014).

Social skills training is an evidence-based psychological intervention used to develop social skills. According to Joanna Węglarz and Dorota Bentkowska, social skills training should be based on eight skill areas. The first is the realm of emotions. Work in this area is based on recognizing emotions in oneself, dealing with one's emotions, recognizing emotions in others, and constructively dealing with other people's emotions. The second area concerns social norms. According to Węglarz and Bentkowska, the most important thing here is to work on norms of politeness and waiting one's turn, practicing different rules of behavior in different places and rules of interaction with peers. The third area is the sphere of interpersonal communication. Within this area, basic verbal and non-verbal communication skills are developed and communication problems and barriers are identified. The fourth skill area is developing a theory of mind. In this area, skills such as noticing others, developing one's imagination, and understanding another person's perspective are practiced. The fifth area is self-knowledge and self-awareness. Within its scope, the development of such skills as self-description and self-presentation, developing one's own potential, and recognizing the similarities and differences between people should be supported. The sixth skill area is assertiveness. Within this skill area, issues related to understanding

the differences between assertive, aggressive, and submissive attitudes, awareness of one's own personal space (physical and psychological boundaries), and awareness of other people's boundaries should be supported. The seventh area according to Węglarz and Bentkowska is dealing with difficult situations. In this area, the skills of coping with stress, adopting an appropriate cognitive attitude to difficult situations, and problem-solving are strengthened. The last area is cooperation (Węglarz, Bentkowska 2022).

Areas of Social Skills That Develop Resilience in the Face of Cyberbullying

Work to develop resilience in the face of cyberbullying should start at early school age from shaping mindfulness. It is important that young children have the ability to focus attention and control breathing, which is very useful in reducing stress, but also optimizes the ability to learn. These issues can be developed through games or by practicing yoga for children. Being aware of one's own emotional states is crucial to being resilient to life's hardships. In developing resilience against cyberbullying, it is necessary to focus on several competences. Working on emotions as an introduction to actions that shape resilience is crucial. Irrespective of the age of the participants (from preschool children to adolescents), different people have more or fewer problems with emotions, and those participants whose social development was disturbed need in-depth work in this area. Moreover, emotional development is inseparable from social development. Work on emotions can begin even in young children through various types of games and fun—psychoeducation.

The above assumptions may be confirmed by research conducted on Chinese teenagers (10–20 years old) which showed that a high level of competence in mindfulness and empathy makes people involved in cyberbullying more resistant to its effects (Guangzhe et al. 2020). It was confirmed also by the research conducted among Spanish youths aged 11 to 19. Based on research results, it can be concluded that attentive people, when witnessing cyberbullying, take action to provide social and emotional support to the victims of cyberbullying. The opposite tendency was noticed in those witnesses

of cyberbullying who were known for a lack of attentiveness. Their behavior supported the allegations of cyberbullying and encouraged them to escalate their violent actions (Prieto-Fidalgo et al. 2022).

Working on emotions is an introduction to activities to build the competences of self-knowledge and self-awareness, which are also crucial for the development of social interactions. How a person functions in a relationship with another person, how effective they are in establishing relationships, and how satisfying these relationships will be all depend on what the individual thinks about themselves. It is also important to shape the awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, interests, and self-confidence. As part of social learning in the school environment, it is crucial to work on this area of social skills. Self-awareness when being a victim of cyberbullying creates space for naming the feelings that accompany this event and discourages treating it as the only measure of personal value. Self-awareness helps one find strategies to proactively deal with this problem by asking for help.

The second area that is very helpful in building resilience in the face of cyberbullying is emotional control, regulation of emotions in order to cope with stress, and endurance in overcoming obstacles. These skills are crucial to not succumb to the experience of cyberbullying. They help in adopting socially accepted ways of solving the problem (seeking help in the family environment or seeking institutional help) and not playing the dual role of a victim who also becomes a secondary perpetrator of cyberbullying in an attempt to relieve tension or to retaliate.

The role of self-awareness in building resistance to cyberbullying was pointed out by Sharlene Chadwick (2014). The author, examining Australian youths involved in cyberbullying as both victims and perpetrators, pointed to the key role of self-awareness as a protective factor. Adequate self-esteem and knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses lead young people to avoid engaging in cyberbullying, and if they become victims of it, they actively seek help. People with low self-esteem or defensively high self-esteem are more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying.

The third area is adopting an empathetic attitude and different perspectives and having the ability to understand and to see similarities and differences between people. Developing this area is also

extremely important in terms of cooperation in the family and the school community. Opening up to another person and their otherness, the desire to understand their life path, can be extremely helpful in building the ability to cope with difficult events by understanding the motives and feelings of other people. Another aspect is the ability to be in a relationship. First of all, it is about basing relationships on cooperation, not competition. It is also the ability to openly oppose manifestations of social injustice, aggression, and harm. In the context of cyberbullying, this is crucial to prevent the silent audience effect. The ability of such social opposition can significantly weaken the activities of cyberbullying perpetrators and can become a source of support for those affected by it. Social conflict resolution and the ability to seek help are also within this area of social skills. Another area is the ability to make responsible decisions. Developed as a result of earlier social skills, it also includes issues related to morality and normative standards of making decisions. This is a set of skills related to ethical sensitivity, the ability to evaluate one's actions through the prism of good and evil.

A study on Hungarian adolescents provides interesting conclusions in this regard. Adolescents aged 11–19 who were involved in cyberbullying as victims or perpetrators of online violence were examined in terms of emotional control, the ability to recognize emotions, and socially approved ways of expressing their emotions. The results indicate that negative and socially unacceptable emotion regulation strategies (such as aggression or using psychoactive substances) contribute to an increased risk of being both a perpetrator and a victim of cyberbullying. Moreover, the authors point out that there is a specific feedback loop. Young people who are victims of cyberbullying, if they do not recognize their emotions and cannot control or deal with them—e.g., after incidents of cyberbullying—begin to use cyberbullying against their peers. Moreover, researchers have proven that emotion regulation is related to taking another person's perspective, maintaining positive peer relationships, and accessing social support. Cyberbullying perpetrators have difficulty not only with emotional control, but also with understanding the emotions of their victims. A common motive for their actions is to direct their own unregulated emotions toward an external entity (Arato et al. 2022).

The areas of social skills indicated herein can be developed even at a young age through social skills training. Moreover, such activities should become an element of the school curriculum, especially among adolescents. Developing the aforementioned areas of social skills (self-awareness, coping with stress, empathizing and adopting perspectives, building social relationships, finding socially acceptable ways of resolving conflicts, and taking social and moral responsibility) is a key element in the prevention of cyberbullying. Following Anna Szuster (2021), it can be pointed out that research on the effectiveness of cyberbullying prevention programs prove that empathy and taking the perspective of another person limit digital aggression. Research on the effectiveness of the IMPACT preventive program conducted among 13–16-year-olds from all over Poland also indicated the role of empathy and openness in reducing stereotypical perceptions and egocentric distortions among young people.

Summary

To sum up, by contributing to resilience, social skills training is a key element of cyberbullying prevention. Combined with expanding digital competences and knowledge about cyberbullying, it can become an effective way to prevent it, but also to deal with its consequences. Moreover, developing social skills can be crucial so that in a situation of frustration or conflict, one does not resort to forms of online violence as a way to deal with one's own difficulties. Social skills training is not the only element of prevention, but in my opinion it is crucial because deficiencies in social skills translate into both the tendency to cause cyberbullying and the risk of being a victim. Resilience against cyberbullying can be strengthened during social skills training among various constellations, including difficult conditions, so that people affected by such activities will be able to cope with challenges to a greater or lesser extent—even in high-risk groups. Moreover, after a period of overwhelming and debilitating pressure of various influences that are the essence of cyberbullying, one can notice regulation or recovery—and even the return of normal functioning or growth—due to building resilience among young people.

A key issue regarding educational activities is the universal prevention of cyberbullying. Preventive actions should be based on

social skills training, with a particular emphasis on elements such as mindfulness, self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to take another person's perspective. Working on recognizing one's own and other people's emotions, emotional control, and socially acceptable ways of regulating emotions also play an important role. These basic social skills are crucial for building resilience when involved in cyberbullying. They may constitute a protective factor against being a victim or perpetrator of online violence. Moreover, they also contribute to presenting proactive, supportive attitudes toward victims of cyberbullying when witnessing it.

Future research perspectives concern the development, implementation, and evaluation of cyberbullying prevention programs. Building resilience against cyberbullying by developing social skills should be considered a key element of these programs. The implementation of preventive programs based on social skills training should be universal prevention. Moreover, at the level of secondary prevention, programs dedicated to victims, witnesses, and perpetrators of cyberbullying should be preceded by a thorough diagnosis of the participants' social competences. A functional diagnosis of social competences should place special emphasis on the social skills in which the participants require support. Moreover, cyberbullying prevention programs should be implemented at the stage of early school education. Supporting social competences and building students' resilience should be based on the knowledge of the regularities of the psychosocial development of children and adolescents.

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