Investigating Resilience and Cybervictimization Among Adolescents

Project Description

This project was inspired by previous research conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Scherer in an Independent Study lab. The final product of this research was compiled into a presentation that is used in Dr. Scherer's Positive Psychology course. In this previous research project, we examined the empirical evidence that the Penn Resiliency program will enhance children's wellbeing. Specifically, we studied how the wellbeing in children was being assessed (e.g., less depression, less anxiety, enhanced life satisfaction) and whether the criteria assessed influenced the effectiveness of the program. After my experience researching resilience with children, I wanted to expand on this topic into adolescents and the challenges they face. In collaboration with Dr. Santo, we are examining an ongoing issue among adolescents with no foreseeable end, cybervictimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2013). Our goal is to understand the differences among adolescents that are more resilient to the impacts of these online occurrences. We are specifically interested in what characteristics make these adolescents resilient and how these findings can translate into helping other adolescents combat this issue. In this project, we will use a database, PeNSE2019, that compiles national health surveys taken by adolescents. These surveys asked adolescents questions about mental and physical well-being. We will be analyzing the questionnaires pertaining to their mental health, particularly those who have reported experiences of cyberbullying.

Background

Adolescence can already be a time of stress and turmoil. School and the addition of adult responsibilities can become unbearable if adolescents are facing peer-victimization. Thus, it can be difficult to adapt a resilient mindset when they are not equipped with the tools needed to do so (Ringdal et al., 2020). It can be difficult to exactly define peer-victimization, because of the numerous circumstances in which it can occur. Yet, it is thought to involve "humiliation or physical threats" that can happen in person, or online (Patchin & Hinduja, 2013). Our main goal with this project is to understand if a tool, such as resilience, can be used to combat the effects of peer-victimization. If so, which adolescents already have this skillset, and how did they acquire it. Researchers suggest that being resilient means being able to overcome obstacles while managing unfavorable circumstances. It is the ability see a goal through even if success if not prevalent right away. Resilient people are found to have "self-efficacy, coping skills, [and] autonomy" (Navarro et al., 2018).

There is a substantial amount of research conducted on the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents. These findings elucidate why adolescents deal with cybervictimization and what long term effects it can have. It has been suggested that cyberbullying affects mental health and can lead to serious disorders such as depression and anxiety (Patchin & Hinduja, 2013). As previously stated, there is no clear solution to cyberbullying. Patchin and Hinduja (2013) suggest that although in person bullying is still more prevalent, the cases of it occurring online are on the rise. What remains to be understood however, is the process which explains why some adolescents are less impacted by cybervictimization. In a study by Navarro and their colleagues, adolescents were asked to fill out questionnaires to rate how often they encountered cyber-victimization, self-report their resilience level, and their views of "fatalism" on scales from one to five. It was ultimately found that resilience served as a "moderator" that "may help cope with the negative outcomes of stressful and risky events through positive and strengthening coping strategies" (2018). This research found that adolescents who reported higher levels of resilience had a more positive outlook compared to their peers with fatalistic beliefs (Navarro et al., 2018). The question that remains is

why and how these adolescents developed strong resilience. Dr. Santo and I want to further expand on this question by exploring similar data sets and questionnaires.

Methodology

We will be using surveys on mental wellbeing from PeNSE 2019. This database offers information on public surveys taken by over 155,000 adolescents in Brazil. We will use structural equation modeling to test the association between cyber-victimization and reports of depression and anxiety symptoms, in the weighted data. Adolescents who demonstrated resilience will be identified and grouped separately from those with typical responses. The independent samples t-tests will be used to compare the groups on other indices of social and emotional wellbeing.

Timeline

Although the research and data on this topic has already been collected, a substantial amount of time will be put into finding the adolescents who demonstrate the characteristics of our research. Following this, we will need to sort through our data and conduct t-tests to compare the groups of adolescents. During our research, we will be submitting our most current findings to upcoming research conferences. The final outcome of the proposed project would be to submit a paper for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

Year	2024								2025				
Month	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5
Cleaning data	X												
Factor creation		X											
Descriptive Stats.			X										
Correlations				X									
Model testing					X								
Conference Submissions						X	X						
Writing results								X	X				
Research & Creativity Fair										X			
MPA conference											X		
Article Submission												X	X

Roles of Student and Faculty

My role as the student is to look through the databases and organize them by relevant findings. I will be examining which adolescents demonstrate characteristics of resilience and what attributes of their life contribute to this. I will be communicating with Dr. Santo regularly to assist me with using software to analyze our data. Dr. Santo, as the faculty member, will meet regularly with me to keep on track of our timeline and answer any questions or concerns about the project. He will help me with scaffolding the results section of our paper and editing the final manuscript.

Budget justification

The student stipend requested for this project is $2,000. This amount will serve as a salary for time dedicated to this project by the student researcher. Approximately 160 hours are needed to complete the bulk of research and writing from May 2024- mid January 2025. Within these 32 weeks, the student researcher will work at a consistent pace at about 5-hr/week = $12.50 hr.

References

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2013). Cyberbullying among adolescents: Implications for empirical research. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *53*(4), 431–432. https://doi-org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.07.030

Navarro, R., Yubero, S., & Larrañaga, E. (2018). Cyberbullying victimization and fatalism in adolescence: Resilience as a moderator. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *84*, 215–221. https://doi-org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.12.011

Ringdal, R., Espnes, G. A., Eilertsen, M.-E. B., BjØrnsen, H. N., & Moksnes, U. K. (2020). Social support, bullying, school-related stress and mental health in adolescence. *Nordic Psychology*, *72*(4), 313–330. https://doi-org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1080/19012276.2019.1710240

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Letter of Support for Lizzie Finn

September 18th, 2023

Dear Fund for Undergraduate Scholarly Experience (FUSE) Committee,

I'm writing to you in strong support of Lizzie Finn's FUSE application to the office of Research and Creative Activity

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT (< 250 words)

I've known Ms. Finn almost a year now. She approached me about her interest in research after beginning to explore opportunities within the undergraduate program in psychology. Shortly thereafter, she joined my lab and began preparation for the submission of this FUSE application. We've since begun meeting weekly to discuss her goal of pursuing additional undergraduate research following this FUSE submission. Specifically, we're exploring a different dataset to test for the effects of cybervictimization among African youth for presentation at a conference in Chicago and at the 2024 Research and Creativity Fair.

With that having been said, her proposed project serves as the ideal extension of her previous research efforts. Having the FUSE support will allow her the opportunity to analyze an understudied population (Brazilian youth) and using a large representative sample (n = ~155,000 adolescents). In addition, she hopes to identify adolescents that are resilient to the impact of cyber victimization and more importantly, the specific responses to questionnaire data that might serve to delineate these two groups. Doing so will require advanced statistical analyses (for an undergraduate student) that I'm happy to help her with.

With all the above in mind, her project is tightly focused and manageable in the time provided FUSE grant. Most importantly, we both feel that this is of great scholarly merit. In conclusion, I feel that Lizzie Finn is definitely deserving of funding for her project and I strongly support her application. Please feel free to contact me at any time for further information.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Bruce Santo, Ph.D.