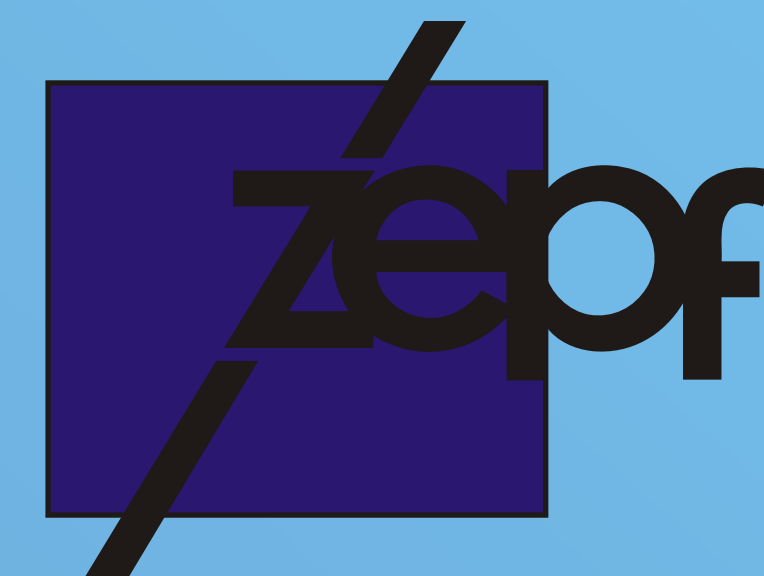


# Cyberbullying in Germany

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## Theory

Cyberbullying, the usage of electronic devices to repetitiously hurt a defenceless victim, is a rather new phenomenon. Therefore, there doesn't exist a lot of research on the issue of this new form of violence, yet. Using the four characteristics of bullying by Olweus (1993) and combining them with the taxonomy for online social cruelty by Willard (2006), leaves us with four different subtypes of cyberbullying:

**Harassment** (repetitiously sending insulting or threatening messages to another person by e-mail, SMS, instant messaging or in chatrooms), **denigration** (spreading of rumours via electronic communication devices), **outing & trickery** (a message revealing personal information, which the victim sent to someone in confidence, is forwarded to other people in order to compromise the victim) and **exclusion** (withholding the opportunity of taking part in social activities).

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

**(A) Prevalence:** A first question is how many students are involved in cyberbullying. So far, there do not exist any studies on the situation in Germany. However, recent media reports suggest, that cyberbullying is a problem in Germany. We therefore assume that the prevalence is significantly greater than zero.

**(B) Bullies/Victims:** Is cyberbullying just "old wine in new bottles" (Beran & Li, 2005)? Is it one of many other methods in the repertoire of bullies? Or is it a completely different phenomenon? If the first thesis is true, the people involved in cyberbullying are the same who are also bullies and victims in real life. In this study, we attempted to prove this by cross-tabulating being a bully in real life with being a bully in cyberspace (and the same for victims) and expected a strong effect ( $r > .50$ ) for the correlation.

**(C) Reactions:** How do students react, when they have become victims of cyberbullying? Based on hypothesis B, we presume that a common factor structure can be found behind coping strategies of real life victims and cybervictims.

## Material and Procedure

An online questionnaire containing the following parts was used:

- ▶ A general part asking about incidents of (cyber)bullying on a 5-point-Likert scale
- ▶ Scales measuring physical and verbal bullying based on the Olweus-questionnaire
- ▶ A new questionnaire for the assessment of cyberbullying, basing on Willard's (2006) taxonomy
- ▶ One scale for each physical, verbal and cyberbullying asking about reactions and coping strategies

## Participants

- N=1987 German students (grades 1 to 13)
- Age: M = 8 years, SD = 2 years
- 64.3% female / 35.7 % male

# RESULTS

## A: Prevalence

Cyberbullying indeed is a problem in Germany: **5.4%** of pupils in the sample report being victimized once a week or even more often. If the incidents happen more seldom, we cannot really speak of cyberbullying, because bullying per definition requires the aspect of repetition. However, it is interesting to see, that the actions which define cyberbullying (harassment, denigration ...) are used to hurt victims just a few times. **14.1%** of the sample reported being cyber"bullied" at least once.

Although the data cannot be considered representative, they still allow a first picture of the situation in Germany.

## B: Bullies /Victims

Crosstabulating being a bully (B-1) and being a victim (B-2) in real life and in cyberspace yields the following results:

B-1:

	Bully No	Bully Yes	Total
Cyberbully No	1792	77	1869
Cyberbully Yes	14	63	77
Total	1806	140	1946

We can conclude from this table, that 81.81% of cyberbullies are also bullies in real life. The correlation between being a bully and being a cyberbully is indeed a strong effect with  $.586, p < .001$ .

B-2:

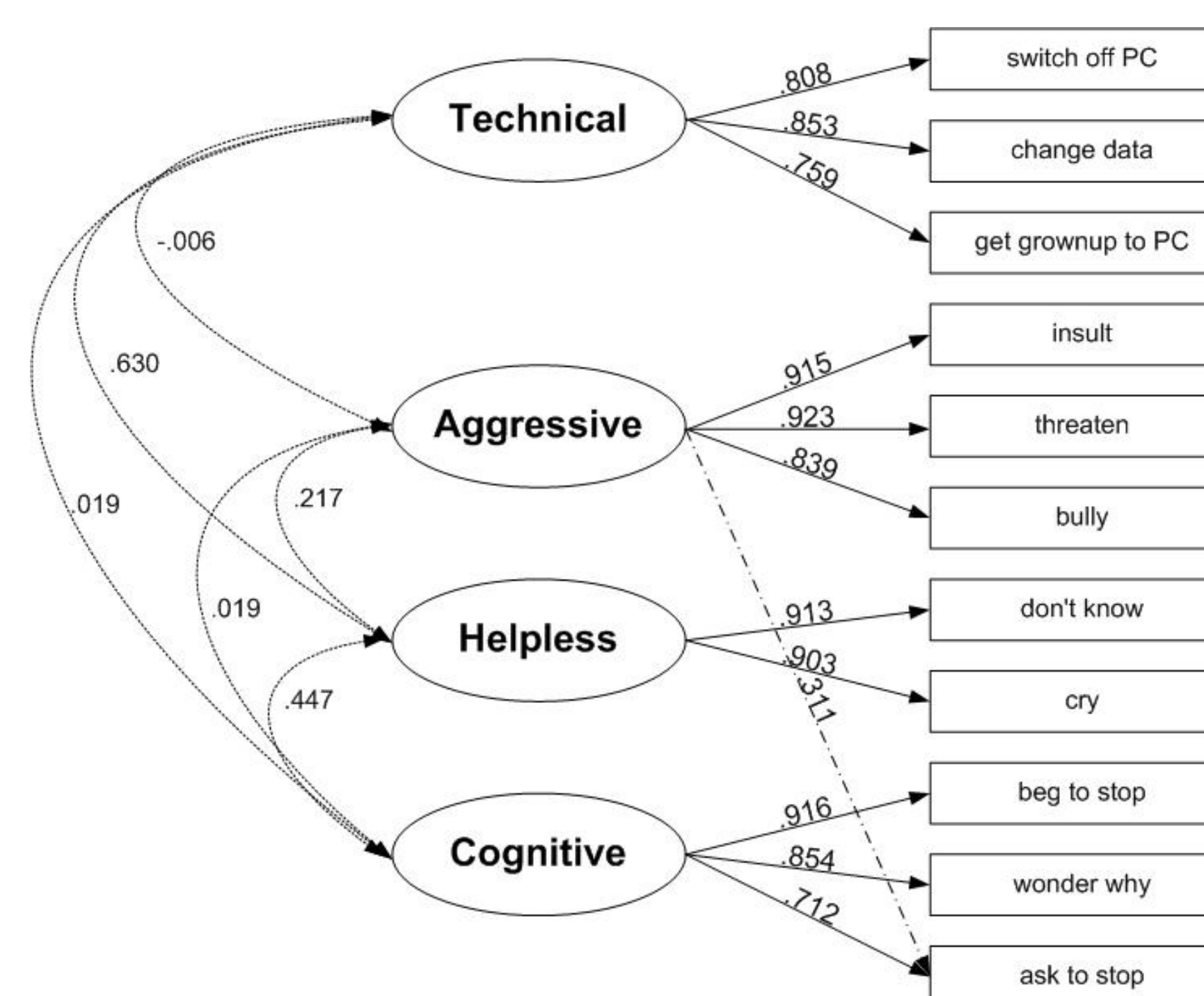
	Victim No	Victim Yes	Total
Cybervictim No	1452	402	1869
Cybervictim Yes	18	90	108
Total	1470	492	1962

The correlation for the victims is not as strong. Although it is still highly significant, we can only speak of a medium effect.

( $r = .324, p < .001$ .)

## C: Reactions

The factor structure behind the reactions to cyberbullying is similar to the one behind physical and verbal bullying (except for the fact, that the former two don't include technical solutions, but instead social ones). The model fits the data rather well with  $RMSEA = .59 / CFI = .95 / TLI = .975$



## Discussion

Three important questions have been answered by this study: The first finding is, that even if we can't be a hundred percent sure of the exact prevalence, we are safe to state that cyberbullying does exist in Germany. As it is also known, that bullying has severe consequences for both bullies and victims (Petermann, 2003) it must be a prior task to protect children from this kind of harm. How can this be done if we know hardly anything about the phenomenon cyberbullying? The second result of this study gives the answer to that question: Until we have further explored cyberbullying with all its special features and their implications, we have to rely on the methods that have been developed in order to tackle traditional bullying. Due to the fact that firstly the involved persons are in many cases the same persons and secondly bullying and cyberbullying both rest upon the same principles (intention to hurt, repetition, imbalance of power and helplessness), we can presume, that those methods should have a positive effect. However, interventions do not have to start from zero. Children and adolescents already have coping strategies. Those could be used as a basis. The third finding of this study suggests, that reactions towards bullying and cyberbullying are also roughly the same. So once again, as a starting point, it would probably be sufficient to teach students how to cope with bullying and to hope they can transfer them to cyberbullying. However, before this can be realised, we first have to identify those strategies that are most successful.