Parental attitudes towards the cyberbullying experienced by their children

La actitud de los progenitores ante el ciberbullying que viven sus hijos e hijas

A atitude dos progenitores perante o cyberbullying que os seus filhos e as suas filhas vivem

父母对孩子经历的网络霸凌所持的态度

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Abstract

The present article describes Spanish parents' perceptions of the unpleasant situations, such as cyberbullying, experienced by their children on the Internet, whether such actions are suffered or perpetrated by their offspring. The relationship between cyberbullying and family conflict, the ability to provide help, child resilience, parental mediation or monitoring and child-initiated mediation is also examined. The present study is based on outcomes of a survey developed by the European research network EU Kids Online and administered to Spanish families in 2019. A nationally representative sample composed of 850 parents of children aged 9-17 was used. Outcomes show that families underestimate the cyberbullying suffered by their children. Four out of ten parents believe that their children have the ability to cope with these situations, especially when they become adolescents. Awareness of cyberbullying is related with parental reporting of experiencing conflict with their children. A type of inverse mediation initiated by the adolescents themselves was observed when young victims reported suffering unpleasant situations online to their parents. However, this was not observed in younger children aged 9-12, who were less likely to report such situations despite being the most likely to suffer harm from them. The present paper concludes by highlighting the need for digital literacy, in both minors and their parents, in order to teach safe Internet use. Education around proper Internet use, as well as encouraging dialogue between parent and child, could prevent minors from engaging in risky behaviour on the Internet.

Keywords: cyberbullying, children, parental mediation, internet

Resumen

Este artículo describe la percepción que tienen los progenitores españoles sobre situaciones molestas que viven sus hijos/as en Internet como el ciberbullying, sufrido o el perpetrado por sus hijos/as. Y analiza su relación con conflictos familiares, la capacidad de ayuda, la resiliencia del menor, y la estrategia de mediación parental de monitorización, o la iniciada por el menor. Se basa en los resultados de una encuesta desarrollada por la red europea de investigación EU Kids Online, aplicada a familias españolas en 2019. La muestra de 850 padres y madres con hijos o hijas de 9-17 años, es representativa a nivel nacional. Los resultados mostraron que las familias subestiman el ciberbullying que sufren sus hijos e hijas. Cuatro de cada diez progenitores creen que sus hijos/as tienen capacidad para enfrentarse a estas situaciones, y más cuando éstos llegan a ser adolescentes. La percepción del ciberbullying está relacionada con situaciones de conflicto que viven con sus hijos/as. Se observa una mediación inversa iniciada por los propios adolescentes, que comunican a sus progenitores situaciones desagradables sufridas online, no así entre niños/as de menor edad 9-12 años, siendo los que menos comunican y más daño sufren. Se concluye subrayando la necesidad de la alfabetización digital para enseñar a hacer un uso seguro de Internet, tanto para los menores como para los progenitores. La educación en el uso de Internet y la promoción del diálogo con sus hijos/as, podría evitar que éstos se involucren en conductas de riesgo en Internet.

Palabras clave: ciberbullying, menores, mediación parental, internet

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Resumo

Este artigo descreve a perceção que os progenitores espanhóis têm sobre situações incómodas vividas pelos seus filhos e pelas suas filhas na Internet, tais como o cyberbullying, sofrido ou perpetrado pelos seus filhos e pelas suas filhas. E analisa a sua relação com conflitos familiares, a capacidade de ajuda, a resiliência da criança e a estratégia de mediação parental de monitorização ou a iniciada pelo menor. Baseia-se nos resultados de um inquérito desenvolvido pela rede europeia de investigação EU Kids Online, aplicado a famílias espanholas em 2019. A amostra de 850 pais e mães com filhos ou filhas de 9-17 anos é representativa a nível nacional. Os resultados mostraram que as famílias subestimam o cyberbullying sofrido pelos seus filhos e pelas suas filhas. Quatro em cada dez progenitores acreditam que os seus filhos e as suas filhas têm capacidade para lidar com estas situações, especialmente quando chegam à adolescência. A perceção do cyberbullying está relacionada com situações de conflito que vivem com os seus filhos e as suas filhas. Observa-se uma mediação inversa, iniciada pelos próprios adolescentes, que comunicam aos seus progenitores situações desagradáveis que sofreram online, mas não entre as crianças mais novas dos 9 aos 12 anos, que são as que menos comunicam e mais prejudicadas. Conclui-se salientando a necessidade da alfabetização digital para ensinar a utilizar a Internet de forma segura, tanto para os menores como para os progenitores. A educação sobre a utilização da Internet e a promoção do diálogo com os seus filhos e as suas filhas poderá impedi-los de se envolverem em comportamentos de risco na Internet.

Palavras-chave: cyberbullying, menores, mediação parental, internet

摘要

这篇文章描述了西班牙父母对孩子在网络上的不愉快经历所持的态度，如遭受或实施网络霸凌。同时文章也分析该态度与家庭冲突、支持能力、孩子的心里韧性、家长监视的调解策略或由孩子发起的调解策略间的关系。研究基于 2019 年 EU Kids Online 欧洲研究网络设计制作的问卷结果中针对西班牙家庭的部分。研究样本为 850 名父亲或母亲，他们孩子的年龄在 9 到 17 岁之间，选取这些样本的原因是因为它们有较高的国内代表性。研究结果表明父母低估了他们的孩子所经历的网络霸凌程度。每 10 位家长中有 4 位认为他们的孩子有足够的能力应对这种情况，如果孩子为青少年，父母认为他们的应对能力则更高。父母对网络霸凌的态度跟孩子生活的冲突环境有关。研究结果也观察到存在逆向的由青少年自己发起的调解。他们会将自己在网络上的不愉快经历告诉他们的父母。但是这种情况并没有表现在更小的年龄阶段群体上，也就是 9 到 12 岁的孩子身上，他们是跟父母沟通最少，遭受霸凌伤害最大的年龄段。研究最后指出提高父母及孩子的数字素质、教会他们安全使用网络势在必行。针对网络使用方面的教育及对家长孩子间沟通的促进，可以避免网络危险行为对孩子产生的消极影响

关键词: 网络霸凌、孩子、家长调解、网络

Introduction

Research conducted by the research network known as EU Kids Online shows that online opportunities and risks go hand in hand. Specifically, whilst children and adolescents benefit from more opportunities, acquiring more digital skills and abilities as they engage more with the Internet, they are also exposed to more risks (Livingstone *et al*., 2011a; Garmendia *et al.*, 2019a). Coping with risky or upsetting situations helps to reduce or, even, prevent them from causing harm and, as children get older, they may become more able to deal with disturbing situations by developing resilience (Garmendia *et al.*, 2019b). Both age and gender are related to social competence and pro-social attitudes, which children develop gradually over time. Moreover, involvement in aggressive behaviour decreases as young people age and reach adolescence (Romera *et al*., 2022).

As technology becomes increasingly central to children's daily lives, new types of social aggression begin to unfold. Such aggression includes cyberbullying, which affects many children and adolescents on a daily basis and involves minors from diverse individual and social backgrounds. Moreover, young people themselves recognise cyberbullying as one of the online risks that causes the most harm (Garmendia *et al.*, 2019b).

Undoubtedly, exposure to online risks and the potential harm this may cause are of

concern to parents (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2018), especially, those of younger children (Mustaqim *et al*., 2021) given that parents have a responsibility as internet users themselves. Nonetheless, this concern is not always shared (Cohen-Almagor, 2018) by other social agents, such as the education system, which must safeguard the (digital) well-being of minors (Smahel et al., 2020).

Independent of parental and child risk perceptions regarding online situations (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020; Garmendia *et al.,*2020; Garmendia *et al.,*2019a), evidence exists that parental awareness of the online risks to which their children are exposed increases parental awareness of their child's engagement in other digital activities. More aware parents are more likely to employ a greater number of enabling strategies, such as teaching their offspring to make good use of the Internet, accompaniment and, even, parental monitoring or supervision of the content and contacts with which children engage (Livingstone *et al*., 2017). Such strategies focus on enabling children to capitalise on opportunities, whilst, at the same time, reducing risk (Garmendia *et al.,* 2012).

Over the last decade, there has been much debate around the importance of active parental mediation strategies, including communication, monitoring, and content sharing, as a way of addressing online risks to minors (López de Ayala *et al*., 2019; Shin & Lwin 2017). In contrast, very few studies have focused on analysing the different factors that might influence parental identification, response and attitudes toward experiences that have negative consequences for their children, such as cyberbullying, and the way in which this might influence the digital well-being of minors.

Thus, the present study aims to explore the perceptions of Spanish parents of the cyberbullying that is both suffered and perpetrated by their children, and its relationship with family conflict, parental capacity to offer help, child resilience and parental or filial mediation.

State of the issue

Online and offline bullying are often connected and, frequently, cyberbullying is a continuation of bullying that was initiated face to face, frequently taking place at school. Those who are involved in online bullying are often involved in offline bullying as well (Garmendia *et al.,*2019b). According to Anar's study on bullying and cyberbullying in Spain, both phenomena have been on the rise in recent years and mainly take place in the school setting (Anar, 2018). Previous research has identified a link between perpetrating cyberbullying and engaging in maladaptive behaviours, such as aggressive and deviant behaviour, and it is often engaged in as a means to resolving conflict, because of arguments and envy or, even, as a form of revenge or carrying out pranks (Anar, 2018).

Research conducted by Iranzo, Buelga, Cava and Ortega-Barón (2019) shows that cyber-victimisation has a direct and indirect effect on suicidal ideation, through perceived stress, loneliness, depressive symptomatology and psychological agony. However, Patchin & Hinduja (2011) highlight a lack of conclusive evidence to confirm that cyberbullying causes suicide. Moreover, cases of suicide arising from cyberbullying cannot be attributed (or at least not exclusively) to cyberbullying itself, although bullying can exacerbate the risk of suicide and other vulnerabilities. In research conducted with Spanish adolescents, Ortega-Baron, Buelga, & Cava (2016) found cyberbullying victimisation to be associated with a lack of social support (family, school, or other) and difficulties in the social realm. These findings, which also coincide with those reported by Buelga et al. (2012), highlight that less popular young people are at greater risk of being victimised via traditional bullying.

Bullies often feel lonely due to a lack of social support from the family and/or school. This can lead to a low sense of well-being and, as a result, engagement in cyberbullying. In other words, such individuals have a tendency to be even more violent and intimidating online

(Eden *et al.,* 2014). Ybarra & Mitchell (2004) found that poor family relationships, as defined based on a deficient follow-up of incidents, a lack of emotional bonding and constant disciplinary measures were associated with more frequent cyber-aggression and victimisation.

The characteristics of cyberbullying differentiate it from offline bullying. The main feature of in-person bullying is repetition, which can sometimes lead to a single online aggression, which is then widely disseminated on social networks meaning that it is sustained and perpetuated (Levy *et al*., 2012; Menesini *et al*., 2012). Published material that is upsetting and harmful can easily be copied, stored and shared across many different channels, allowing further harm to occur due to the repeated dissemination and reach of shared material (Pfetsch, 2016).

A new factor in online bullying is the potential anonymity offered to bullies, enabling them to conceal themselves (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Consequently, the victim often finds it difficult to stop being bullied online (Ovejero *et al*., 2013). The ease with which the audience is expanded in cyberbullying is a factor that increases the victim's feeling of helplessness and harm above that typically seen with traditional bullying (Estévez *et al.,* 2010). This being said, Udris (2015) highlights that most cases of cyberbullying involve classmates and victims usually know the identities of their aggressors.

In situations of bullying experienced by minors, action taken by parents such as restrictive parental mediation strategies that limit their children's access to online content or activities, or monitoring strategies such as supervising the content their children can see at a later time when they are not present (Dedkova & Smahel, 2019), are related to a lower level of risk, specifically when it comes to cyberbullying (Garmendia *et al.,* 2012).

Restrictive strategies, together with communication and security strategies, are the approaches preferred by Spanish parents (Garmendia *et al.,*2020). Content monitoring

and supervision strategies, most commonly used with younger children, are least used when children enter adolescence at the age of 13 (Dedkova & Smahel, 2019). This has been attributed to parental respect for children's privacy (Garmendia *et al.,*2020). Restrictions that are linked to exposure to fewer risks tend to be more present in households in which more behavioural restrictions are in place, but, also, in households where young people feel less family support (Garmendia *et al.,*2020) and are exposed to fewer opportunities (Livingstone *et al.,* 2017).

Evidence also shows that children who experience a higher number of unpleasant or harmful situations also report more parental mediation. This may be attributed to changes in parental intervention following prior incidents in which children confronted situations deemed to be unsafe by their parents (Garmendia *et al.,*2012).

Gender and age of the child impact parental mediation, more so in Spain (Garmendia *et al.,* 2019a; Ramos-Soler *et al*., 2018) than in other European countries (Düerager & Livingstone, 2012; Smahel *et al*., 2020), with more intervention observed when it comes to girls than boys. This difference is attributed to greater parental concern for the safety of their daughters (Garmendia *et al.,*2020) who may be more vulnerable online (Bartau-Rojas *et al*., 2020; Hasebrink *et al*., 2011). In terms of age, more mediation is seen in relation to younger children than older children. This indicates that parents perceive their children to have better digital skills and be more resilient to risk when they become adolescents, whilst also recognising their children's rights to privacy and autonomy (López-de-Ayala *et al*., 2019, Livingstone *et al*., 2017).

Parental perceptions of the risks to which their children are exposed has also been attributed to the types of mediation they themselves implement, with a trend towards greater implementation of non-restrictive mediation as risk perceptions increase (Livingstone *et al*., 2017). Developing trust and strong communication between parents

and children are important for enhancing resilience in children. This can help families to get along better together and enable educational mediation to prevent adolescent involvement in cyberbullying (Yot-Domínguez y Cotán 2020; Gómez *et al.*, 2019).

Livingstone and other authors urge the importance of parental perception of risk as a factor that can act to reduce children's' risk exposure through the application of mediation strategies (Livingstone *et al.,* 2017; Nelissen & den Bulck, 2017). These same authors have also highlighted the importance of the minor's own agency in mediation. In other words, minors themselves must play a role by seeking help from parents or, even, offering help. This is known as reverse or filial mediation (Garmendia *et al.,* 2019a).

In an effort to protect children and look after their well-being, parents seek help and information when faced with disturbing situations experienced on the Internet. This often leads them to resort to different social agents. Dedkova, Smahel & Just (2020) have identified the different types of sources used by parents: 1) the Internet; 2) specialised sources or expert websites; 3) diverse sources including television, friends and family; and 4) peers and specialists.

The present research team asked parents about the different risks they believed their children had faced on the Internet. Responses were framed by the ranking of risks developed by the EU Kids Online network (see Livingstone *et al.,* 2011a). Moreover, given that is the risk that is most acutely perceived by young people, the present study turns its focus to examine this issue.

The aim of the present article is to uncover parental perspectives regarding the cyberbullying experienced and/or inflicted by their children and the relationship of this with family conflict, parents' ability to help, resilience of the child, parental mediation strategies involving monitoring and strategies initiated by the minors themselves.

Research issues

The following research questions were posed:

- RQ1. What perceptions do parents have of the cyberbullying experienced or perpetrated by their children?
- RQ2. Does the age and gender of the child have an influence on the perception and incidence of cyberbullying suffered and perpetrated by children?
- RQ3. What level of support do parents report receiving when faced with the online risks to which their children are exposed and how confident are parents about their children's ability to overcome these risks?
- RQ4. What is the relationship between family conflict and parental perceptions of cyberbullying?
- RQ5. How do parents respond to perceived incidences of cyberbullying? Do parents respond by employing monitoring or follow-up strategies, or do children demonstrate agency (reverse mediation) by asking for help?

Method

The present study, focused on the digital experiences of Spanish families with children aged between 9 and 17, was based on a previously conducted quantitative macro-survey administered in 2010 by the European research network EU Kids Online. This survey was administered in 25 European countries, including Spain. The parental questionnaires used in 2010 were reviewed and adapted between 2017 and 2019 biennium by experts in the research network. In this sense, new socio-technological developments were taken into account and new questions were included for parents.

The Spanish contingent, EU Kids Online (UPV/EHU), received funding from the European project SIC-Spain - "Safer Internet Centre Spain"- which was co-funded by the European Union (EU) and coordinated by the National Institute of Cybersecurity (INCIBE) through the Internet Safety Center for minors in Spain (IS4K). Spain was the only European country, aside from Ireland, within the EU

Kids Online network to carry out a study focused on families. Parental questionnaires (2017-19) were translated from English to Spanish by researchers within the Spanish EU Kids Online team (UPV/EHU) and adapted to the current socio-technological context of Spanish families.

Participants

The survey was carried out in Spain in 2019 among families with children aged between 9 and 17 with Internet access. We interviewed the adult (mother, father or legal guardian) who was most involved in the internet supervision or mediation tasks involving the minor.

In 2010, the survey was administered to families with children aged between 9 and 16 from 25 different countries. Researchers for both the 2010 and the 2017-19 biennium study meticulously discussed the age range of minors. Evidence shows that the scarcity of research focusing on children under 9 years of age using the Internet in Europe requires a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative approach, as minors may lack the maturity required to properly fill out a questionnaire (Livingstone *et al.,* 2011b).

The Spanish sample consisted of 518 mothers and 332 fathers. A total of 434 families with children aged between 9 and 12 were included, alongside 416 families with adolescents from 13-17 years old.

The sample came from the most populated regions of the country and a subsample was selected from the following regions in order to guarantee the representativeness of the sample at a national level: Basque Country (125 subjects), Andalusia (125), Catalonia (125), Valencia (125), Madrid (125), Galicia (125) and Extremadura (100). Each of these subsamples was stratified on the basis of habitat, with a total of 680 surveys being administered in central regions of participating cities and 170 surveys being administered in other localities.

When determining sample size, a confidence level of 95.5% and a margin of error of +/- 3.45 was established.

With regards to the age of parents, the sample was divided into four age groups with 358 respondents being aged 35-44, 408 being aged 45-54, 42 being aged 24-34 and another 42 being over 55 years old.

Almost half of the families surveyed (n = 433) had a high school education and a third of families (n = 332) had a university education. A total of 85 surveyed families had been schooled only to a primary school level.

Family socioeconomic status (SES) was established by considering the highest level of studies completed by both parents alongside their occupation. Of the surveyed families, 476 were classified as having a medium socioeconomic status, 264 families had a high socioeconomic status and 110 families had a low socioeconomic status.

Data collection

The survey was conducted with one parent from each participating family. In order to ensure the receipt of high quality responses, families were surveyed face-to-face in their own homes.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymity was ensured. Moreover, all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Measurement instruments

The instrument used in the present study was based on the questionnaire previously administered in the EU Kids Online Survey. The first wave of surveys of children aged 9 to 16 and their parents was conducted in 2010 in 25 different countries in order to obtain a rigorous quantitative and comparative database on Internet use. This procedure is described by Professor S. Livingstone in their published technical report (Livingstone *et al.,* 2011b).

Both child and parent questionnaires were re-designed and adapted by both the EU Kids Online research network (2017-19) and the international research network Global Kids Online (2016-2010) in order to fit the new

socio-technological conditions and to allow for comparisons over time and between different countries and regions. The two research networks discussed included items and translations were supervised by national experts from each country. In order to ensure understanding of the questions and their proper translation, cognitive tests were conducted in several countries (Zlamal *et al.*,2020).

Reliability of the scales used to measure parental mediation strategies is reflected in a report published by Dürager and Sonck, which confirms that the questions work well in different countries and in their respective languages (Dürager and Sonck, 2014).

In consideration of different socio-technological developments and new uses of the Internet within the family context, some questionnaire items were reformulated in 2018. Questions pertaining to parental mediation were revised by the EU Kids Online network, with new items being added, such as those referring to reverse mediation in order to include the role of the child as mediator. Questions on family conflict and parental concerns related to the well-being of their sons and daughters were also modified.

Questions chosen for the present study were grouped into the following sections:

• Socio-demographic variables pertaining to parents and children.

• Parental perceptions of the cyberbullying experienced and perpetrated by their children: Q26: "To the best of your knowledge, during the past year, did any of the following happen to your child when they were navigating the Internet? Did someone treat them in a rude, disrespectful, or hurtful way? Or did your son or daughter treat someone in a rude, disrespectful or hurtful way?" Response options: "Yes", "No", "I don't know".

• Ability to help child cope with online harm: Q24: "Do you feel that you can help your child cope with online situations that may upset or disturb them?" Q25: "Do you think your child can manage certain online situations that may upset or disturb them by themselves?" Response options: "Not at all, Not a lot, Quite a lot, Completely, I don't know, I prefer not to answer".

• Family conflict and cyberbullying: Q14: "Do you believe any of the following situations to represent possible causes of 'conflict' or 'disagreement' between you and your son or daughter? Their behaviour / The way in which they use the Internet, their phone or technology". Response options: "Yes, No, I don't know".

• Tendency of the child to ask for help or communicate incidents and parental monitoring or oversight of internet use: Q15: "Has your son or daughter ever done any of the following things? Asked for help when faced with an online situation that they could not manage / Talked to you about things that bother them online". Q21: "When your child uses the Internet, how often do you check any of the following after they have been online? Their e-mail account and the messages they send from this application or others in order to communicate / The friends or contacts they add to their social networks or instant messaging services". Response options: "Never", "Hardly ever", "Sometimes", "Often", "Very often".

Data were processed using SPSS quantitative analysis software, employing comparative statistics, such as Chi-square, in order to examine the associations between variables.

Results

Cyberbullying

Parental awareness of the cyberbullying to which their children are exposed is lacking (Table 1). Parents tend to underestimate the online risks experienced by their children, with only 8% of parents perceiving such risks. However, more concern about cyberbullying was expressed in the case of girls, with this concern increasing with the age of the child. In this sense, 14% of parents of adolescent daughters (13-17 years old) reported that their daughters had experienced cyberbullying. Gender differences were statistically significant, although differences did not emerge within the youngest age group (9-12 years old). Parents were even less likely to perceive that their children perpetrated cyberbullying than suffered cyberbullying. In

this case, no statistically significant differences emerged as a function of age group or gender.

Table 1. Parental perceptions of incidences of cyberbullying suffered and perpetrated by their children

	Gender	9-12 years old	13-17 years old	Total	*p*
Cyberbullying experienced	**Boy**	7.6%	5.5%	6.7%	.374
	Girl	5.2%	14.9%	10.1%	.001
	Total	6.5%	10.2%	8.3%	.054
	p	.301	.003	.079	
Cyberbullying perpetrated	**Boy**	4.7%	2.5%	3.7%	.229
	Girl	1.6%	4.5%	3.1%	.088
	Total	3.3%	3.5%	3.4%	.849
	p	.071	.272	.625	

Note: p = P value obtained for the chi-square test (χ^2) Response option for this section: "Yes"

Self-confidence and resilience

Parental self-confidence in their ability to help their children was very high and, with regards to responding to cases of cyberbullying, parents felt highly capable of helping their children. Moreover, no statistically significant differences were found as a function of age or gender.

Further, parents believed their children to be resilient and were confident about their ability to deal with online risks. A total of 43.5% of parents (Table 2) believed their children to be quite able or fully able to deal with online risks. Parents of older children had even more confidence in their ability to cope, regardless of gender.

Table 2. Parental perceptions of their own ability to help their children and their child's resilience

	Gender	9-12 years old	13-17 years old	Total	*p*
Children's ability to deal with online risks	**Boy**	25.8%	67.5%	45.0%	.000
	Girl	18.4%	63.5%	41.7%	.000
	Total	22.5%	65.5%	43.5%	.000
	p	.072	.404	.339	
Parents' ability to help their children	**Boy**	84.6%	81.8%	83.3%	.855
	Girl	77.8%	84.4%	82.9%	.642
	Total	81.8%	83.7%	83.1%	.846
	p	.683	.843	.966	

Note: p = P value produced from chi-square analysis (χ^2)

Family conflict

Conflicts between parents and children due to the behaviour of the latter were associated with parental perceptions of the cyberbullying experienced and perpetrated by their children (Table 3). In both cases, conflict was associated with the perception of both types of cyberbullying. Further, when conflict was

related to the use of technology, parents were more likely to perceive that their children suffered online bullying but not that they perpetrated such bullying. It is worth mentioning that a relationship existed between conflict resulting the child's behaviour and that arising from technology use (χ^2 [1, N=841] = 61.070, p< .000), with 47% of parents reporting family conflict in relation to both.

Table 3. Relationship between parental perceptions of cyberbullying suffered and perpetrated by their children and family conflict.

	Disputes due to child's behaviour				Disputes due to technology use			
	Yes	No	Total	*p*	Yes	No	Total	*p*
Cyberbullying experienced	12.9%	6.2%	8.2%	.001	10.9%	6.6%	8.1%	.028
Cyberbullying perpetrated	7.2%	1.8%	3.4%	.000	3.8%	3.0%	3.3%	.553

Response to cyberbullying

Finally, parents responded differently with regards to reverse mediation with the child, depending on their perception of the presence or absence of cyberbullying (Table 4). In the case of adolescents aged 13-17, 34% of participating children told their parents that something had upset them on the Internet, whilst 31.7% reported having asked their parents for help. Further, children were significantly less likely to turn to their parents when their parents were not aware that any bullying was taking place.

Younger children were less likely to tell their parents about situations that upset them on the Internet and, in contrast to that seen generally, minimal differences were observed as a function of whether the parent was aware that bullying was taking place. In the case of younger children, parents responded when they perceived bullying to be taking place by implementing monitoring strategies, such as checking their children's contacts or supervising their email. This parental response was not observed in the case of adolescent minors.

Table 4. Responses of children and parents to cyberbullying

Reverse mediation by children		
Your children talk to you about things that bother them on the		
Parents who perceive cyberbullying	17.9%	34.1%
Parents who do not	11.2%	9.8%
Sig. p=	*.290*	*.000*
Your child asks for help when faced with a situation on the Internet		
Parents who perceive cyberbullying	28. 6%	31.7%
Parents who do not	20.2%	14.9%
Sig. p=	*.288*	*.006*
Parents inspect contacts that are added by their child		
Parents who perceive cyberbullying	37.0%	26.8%
Parents who do not	18.3%	19.3%
Sig. p=	*.018*	*.252*
Parents check emails and messages sent by their child		
Parents who perceive cyberbullying	40.7%	7.3%
Parents who do not	20.3%	11.3%
Sig. p=	*.013*	*.438*

Note:
  p = p-value produced from chi-square analysis (χ^2).
  Recoded variables for this section, response options: "Often" and "Very Often".
  Parents who perceive cyberbullying, response option: "Yes".

Conclusions and Discussion

According to outcomes of the present study, the incidence of cyberbullying experienced by children is low from the point of view of parents. However, parental perceptions in the present study differ to those of children of similar ages examined in the EU Kids Online study for Spain (Garmendia *et al.,*2019). In the aforementioned study, 31% of Spanish children aged 9-10 years old and 35% of those aged 15-17 reported having experienced bullying, both on- and offline. These figures contrast starkly to the estimates given by the parents of these children, with just 6.7% and 10.2%, respectively, believing that their children suffered bullying. On the other hand, 20% of children reported having bullied their peers and yet only 3.4% of parents perceived their children to have engaged in bullying. From this it can be concluded that parents underestimate the incidence of cyberbullying affecting their children.

In the same study, parents were found to be highly capable of helping their children in dealing with potentially upsetting online situations. The majority of the current generation of parents are confident in their ability to help their children and satisfied with the opportunities they have to provide such help. This contrasts with current mainstream thinking (Helsper *et al*., 2013; Livingstone *et al*., 2017) that tags parents with the label of "digital immigrants" as proposed by Prensky (2001). In addition, parents also have confidence in their children's own ability to overcome disturbing online situations. Such confidence is related to both the age of the minor and the logic that dictates that the older the child, the more they engage in online activities and, consequently, the better their digital skillset (Garmendia *et al.,* 2019).

The lack of parental awareness of the risk of cyberbullying found in the present study represents a cause for concern, especially, considering that previous research argues that bullying, whether on- or offline, generally poses more harm to children (Livingstone *et al*., 2011; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014) than

other potential risks, such as accessing inappropriate content or making contact with strangers. In addition, three out of four Spanish children suffer incidents of cyberbullying and report feeling distressed as a result, with prevalence being highest among 9-10 year olds and girls being especially affected regardless of age (Garmendia *et al.,*2019).

The present research found that parents who report more conflict resulting from their child's behaviour or technology use are more aware of both forms of cyberbullying, with a significant relationship emerging in the case of conflicts resulting from the child's behaviour. Children may perceive family conflict as a lack of support from their parents. Several studies have reported an association between cyberbullying and children's perceptions of an unsupportive family setting (Yigit *et al*., 2018).

Parents who report being more aware of episodes of cyberbullying are also more likely to mediate via monitoring their children than those who are not aware that such bullying is taking place. In agreement with findings reported by Garmendia *et al* (2012), this may indicate that parents use more mediation strategies when they are aware that their children are being exposed to harm. Although present results did not examine the effectiveness of monitoring strategies in reducing risk, such strategies have been associated with lower levels of cyberbullying (Garmendia *et al.,*2012). Other authors have highlighted the effectiveness of active mediation in the prevention of bullying (Liu *et al*., 2013). Specifically, as stated by Nocentini *et al.* (2019), different a number of protective factors stem from the family setting such as open communication between parent and child, daily support and increased participation in school activities. Effective strategies to resolve issue pertaining to cyberbullying may decrease the negative effects of cyberbullying, including stress, anxiety and depression.

The harm caused by bullying and cyberbullying is substantial given that most victims do not communicate their experiences to responsible adults such as parents or

teachers (Burgess & McLoughlin 2012; Smith & Slonje, 2010). The agency of children in the mediation process has gained importance as a possible factor that might have an influence on overcoming risky situations (Livingstone *et al*., 2017). This refers to reverse or filial mediation (Garmendia *et al.,* 2019), or the child's ability to either request help from parents, or offer them help and inform about things that are bothering them online. Present findings reveal that parents who are aware of episodes of cyberbullying suffered by their children, are more likely than those who are not to perceive that their children turn to them for help and inform them about unpleasant situations suffered online. Worryingly, findings also reveal that younger children, who tend to suffer the most harm, are less likely to communicate with their parents about this issue than their older counterparts.

Present findings are in line with those reported by Garmendia et al. (2019), who found that children were more likely to help their parents complete online tasks (48%) than ask them for help with problems (17%) or talk to them when something bothered them (14%). Children were observed to be highly protective about their privacy and be unwilling to share their concerns with their parents, at least at first. When faced with unpleasant situations, 70% of participating Spanish children responded that they would talk to a friend, 46% would talk to their parents and only 11% would talk to their teacher.

Often, children remain silent about bullying at home because they think that their parents will cut their access to the Internet. Alternatively, they fear that the situation will become worse if they report the problem, or they simply believe that reporting the issue will not lead to a solution. As stated by Cross *et al*. (2009), 46% of students who reported suffering cyberbullying to a responsible adult, subsequently found their situation to either not improve or become worse.

Finally, whilst parents mostly rely on schools as a source of information and advice on safe internet use to guide their children's online experiences, followed by family, friends and public administrations (Garmendia *et al.,* 2020), school-based actions are also hampered when students stay silent. This prevents teachers from helping victims as they are not aware of what is happening (Del Rey *et al*., 2018).

Further, Ghamrawi & Al-Jammal (2013, p.246) argue that school directors lack knowledge of cyberbullying and tend to believe that this phenomenon does not occur at their centres. With regards to the involvement of schools in the prevention, detection and resolution of cyberbullying and communication with families, Sabella (2012) highlights that school counsellors should take the lead by focusing on five areas. Namely, these areas are facilitating the development of effective school policies, educating parents, educating students, developing peer support programmes and providing other services, such as for reporting and counselling. Such efforts must engage all relevant parties and include teachers, school support services, school leaders, community leaders, policy makers, parents and the students themselves.

In Spain, there is a need to work on digital literacy initiatives that foster strategies aimed at equipping both parents and children (Helsper *et al*., 2013; O'Neill, 2014), with a particular focus on girls (Bartau-Rojas *et al.,* 2020; Garmendia *et al.,*2020; Smahel *et al*., 2020). A further focus should be on pre-adolescent children, as they seem to be more silent when faced with bullying. Educating parents on internet use will not only reduce the likelihood of children engaging in risky online behaviour but, also, promote dialogue on topics that are of interest to children and, resultantly, improve family communication (Buelga, 2013).

Limitations of the research

As a limitation of the present study, it should be noted that the presented data pertain to responses given by parents and not the children themselves. Some studies have indicated, especially when surveying adolescents, that there is a tendency towards

underestimating existing mediation strategies, as adolescents seek to demonstrate independence from their parents (Ergin & Kapci, 2019). In contrast, parents may overestimate their own use of parental mediation in order to seek social acceptance (Rideout *et al.*, 2010). By only gathering parental perspectives, the present study cannot provide a global analysis of the bullying experienced by children as parental perspectives cannot be compared with children's perspectives.

Future lines of work

The present research adds to the evidence in relation to cyberbullying in the family setting by analysing the parental perspective. Nonetheless, a more in-depth study of parental mediation and its effectiveness is necessary to promote access to the opportunities provided online in children. Given the trust shown by parents in schools with regards to their children's education, it would be interesting to promote and evaluate digital literacy interventions at school. Collaboration between families and schools is also called for to improve education around safe and responsible Internet use in children.

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Ethics and conflict of interest

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