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## **Social work supports cyberbullied middle school students in the world and in Vietnam: Literature Review**

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**Abstract.** Cyberbullying is considered a serious problem in recent decades in many nations, comprised of Vietnam. During the Covid – 19 pandemic, middle school students were one of cyberbullying victims whilst long – time learning online. Based on the literature analysis method, theory and reality research, purpose of recommending social work solutions so as to promote the efficiency of supporting cyberbullied middle school students, the author overviews domestic and foreign publications about social work supporting cyberbullied middle school students on 5 axes: The current circumstance of cyberbullying among students; The cultural and socio-economic impact on cyberbullying solves cyberbullying for middle school students; Policy and service system supports middle school students in countries; Support programs mitigate cyberbullying among students; The role of social work in supporting cyberbullied middle school students.

**Keywords.** School social work, cyberbullying, social work support, cyberbullied middle school students.

### **1. Introduction**

Cyberbullying is bullying through Internet-connected communication gadgets, the intentional and repeated harming behavior of a student, or a group of students treat another student in a particular span of time. (Mishna, 2012). Cyberbullying is a form of bullying indirectly conducted by means of technology via the Internet. (Tran Van Cong et al., 2019)

Cyberbullying is a negative consequence attached to the hustling speed of digital economy development in countries around the world. Until 2015, a half of Viet Nam population had accessed social networks online, in which more than 1/3 (47,3 million of users) is teenagers and adolescents from 15 to 24 years old. (World Stats 2015, Cimigo 2011). The prevalence of cyber activity into life uplifts risks for children in all issues, including cyberbullying as illustrated in Regional Workshop on Eliminating Child Bullying in the Cyber and School Environment in 2022 by the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Government of Vietnam, the ASEAN Secretariat, UNICEF, UNESCO, and Singapore's Ministry of Family and Social Development jointly organized. (PV, 2022)

As a result, the author profoundly cognizes that Social Work, during the whole evolution, proves its efficacy in supporting, solving for subjects with social issues in general and cyberbullied middle school students in particular. The purpose of this research is to

synthesize and survey internal and external studies on cyberbullying and social work supporting middle school students who are bullied on the Internet, then, identify new points of the study.

## **2. Research method**

### **2.1. Goal**

The author analyzes, synthesizes and summarizes previous researches on social work supporting cyberbullied middle school students in order to establish the literature review on social work supporting cyberbullied middle school students.

### **2.2. Content**

Review of studies on cyberbullying, school social work, social work supporting junior high school students who are bullied online; Research-related policies.

### **2.3. How to do**

Documents are coded, classified by topics, research directions, analyzed, recorded results of previous studies, pointed out gaps in those studies, thereby confirming the urgency and the necessity of the research issue.

Sources of materials include: Books, textbooks, scientific journal articles and interior and exterior scientific conferences; theses, archives, documents on the website.

Some websites search for English academic documents on cyberbullying and school social work following: <https://scholar.google.com.vn/> (Google Scholar's search page for academic documents), the website of foreign magazines; Some documents are articles from domestic magazines and newspapers such as <http://opac.nlv.gov.vn/pages/opac/wpid-home.html> (Vietnam National Library document search page). The author searched appropriate sourcebooks online by typing keywords: “cyberbullying”, “social work supports cyberbullied middle school students”, “school social work”, etc.

In addition, a number of scientific journals have also provided many different studies on various angles and approaches to cyberbullying.

Documents and reports of domestic and foreign agencies on cyberbullying, for example, documents, circulars, policies of the Government, the Ministry of Education and Training, etc. Other organizations such as: UNICEF, Plan Vietnam, Institute of Medicine - Sociology...

## **3. Result and discussion**

### **3.1. The current circumstance of cyberbullying among students**

Internationally, studies on bullying and cyberbullying phenomena have increased since the 1970s of XX century. There are many concepts, definitions about bullying, especially the one of Faye Mishna (2012) with the study called *Bullying: A guide to research, intervention and prevention: Bullying among students is the intentionally, directly or indirectly aggressive behavior about physics, linguistics, psychology or social relations that harms the victim, occurs in the correlation of power inequality with repetition (Mishna, 2012). It even shows consequences of cyberbullying causing long – term effects on teens such as low self – esteem, stress and suicide.*

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017), *A new global campaign to address cyberbullying* gives information about a research of Microsoft technology corporation in 2016 amongst grown-ups and adolescents of 14 nations with the statistics: 65% people replied that they used to be a victim of at least one cyber risk from unexpected contacts in specific; and another study with 62% interviewees as digital users did not know or were not sure where to find help when cyberbullying victimized. (UNESCO, 2017)

In the study about the popularity of bullying and cyberbullying published on The Spanish Journal of Psychology, the author describes that grade 5 and 6 students amongst 1993 ones in the last stage of primary education in the Basque country (2018), Spain have got: 13.4% are cyber victims, 0.7% are cyber perpetrators, 3.1% are bully-victims and the rest 25.6% are bystanders of cyberbullying. (Machimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018).

*In Viet Nam*, studies in the aspect of school bullying and cyberbullying among middle school students have just been on research for recent several years, consist of some prominent publications as below:

The results of Tran and colleagues in 2016 in a study on 736 middle and high school students in Hanoi, Ha Nam, and Hai Duong express that 24% of participants were victims of at least one form of cyberbullying (Tran, 2015). Another study conducted on 493 students in 3 high schools in Hanoi, Ha Nam, and Hai Duong showed that 35.7% were victims of cyberbullying (Nguyen, Consequences of cyberbullying among high school students, 2016). A study of over 500 high-school students in Da Nang by Nguyen, H.T.B. et al. (2017) found that 19.3% of the students were perpetrators and 16.7% of the students were victims of cyberbullying. (Nguyen, Cyberbullying among high school students in Da Nang, 2017). Thus, these numbers have warned us about the alarming cyberbullying phenomenon.

Doctoral dissertation major in public health defended at Queensland University, Australia (2017): *Bullying roles and associations with mental health of adolescents in Vietnam: A short – term longitudinal study* (Le, Doctor dissertation, 2017) and the article (2016): *Validity and reliability of traditional and cyberbullying victimization scale: Findings from a school-based survey in urban areas of Hanoi and Hai Duong* (Le H. T., et al., 2016) belong to Le Thi Hai Ha have remarkable contribution. They clarified many concepts like bullying, cyberbullying; types of bullying and the correlation between traditional bullying and cyberbullying; analyzed validity and reliability of traditional and cyberbullying victimization scale. The author undertook research on cyberbullying specialized in public health; published school bullying and cyberbullying victimization scale of Vietnam – the measure toolkit was the questionnaire based on Olweus' (Olweus D. , 2013) and Ybarra; evaluated in-depth relation between the consequence of cyberbullying and mental health's; and applied the scale into cyberbullying studies at some localities in Vietnam.

*In general*, studies of authors in the world and in Vietnam have demonstrated some essential points related to school bullying and cyberbullying following:

Publications have stated the concept of cyberbullying is a form of bullying students, school bullying; cyberbullying scale system. They, from the angle of Sociology, Psychology, Public Health, analyze and claim cyberbullying as a serious matter which triggers severe consequence for victims.

Nevertheless, those researches have not deeply assessed affected factors to the bullying behavior of secondary school students and support factors for cyberbullied junior high school students.

### **3.2. The cultural and socio-economic impact on cyberbullying solves cyberbullying for middle school students**

The factors influencing social work activities to support students experiencing cyberbullying in schools are diverse, each of which has a differently positive and negative influence on the implementation of every activity. The specific factors are as follows: Professionalism of social workers; Family; School; Students themselves; Laws and policies of the State.

*In the world*, Thompson and Bolin (2020), "Professional response to cyberbullying: Perspectives from school social workers", explores the views of school social workers on their professional responses to incidents of cyberbullying. It examines their roles, interventions, and challenges when supporting students experiencing cyberbullying in a school setting.

*In Vietnam*, Pham and Le (2020). Research on factors affecting cyberbullying among Vietnamese students. *International Journal of Cybercrime*, 14(1), 61-78.

Many middle schools in Vietnam have had school counseling rooms or school psychology offices. But human resources of these offices are still few, most of whom are teachers or school staff, work based on their own experiences in this field. Correspondingly, supports solving social issues for students in general and for students as cyberbullying victims in particular, have not achieved the efficiency as proposed.

Family factor greatly affects both cyberbullying behavior and the victim of cyberbullying. Children or students who are cyber-bullied at junior high school often grow up in families with these typical characteristics: parents violating the law, low parents' educational level, poor parents, the circle of interaction with external society is still sparse and weak.

Foreign and Vietnamese authors: Nguyen, Nakamura, Kaoruko and Vo (2020), "The relationship between cyberbullying, parental attitudes, adolescents' self-harm behavior and suicide: results from a school survey in Vietnam" - This study examines the association between cyberbullying, parental attitudes, self-harming behavior, and suicide after adjusting confounding factors. Cyberbullying has become an important phenomenon related to self-harm behavior among adolescents in developing countries, and parental acceptance of parental attitudes is positively related to serious mental health problems in adolescents. Therefore, it is necessary to pay full attention in the efforts to promote adolescent health to family factors in the digital age of developing countries. (Nguyen, Nakamura, Kaoruko, & Vo, 2020)

In the school environment, the school's loose association with the family in managing, controlling and educating students, the unclear regulations of the school are also aspects that cause cyberbullying. Next, the awareness of some school leaders on the prevention of cybercrime that causes cyberbullying is still not high so that the attention and care is not significant.

*In foreign countries*, Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011). Professional school counselors and their role in supporting students experiencing cyberbullying. *Journal of Professional School Counseling*, 14(2), 138-148.

*Domestically*, Tran and Luong (2020). Cyberbullying among Vietnamese adolescents: The role of individual, family and school factors. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 113, 104986.

At the age of intermediate school students, it is the period that students develop strongly in both physical and psychological ways. Therefore, the influence of school bullying, cyberbullying on victims is really acute. The bad effect of cyber victimization not only affects the body but also mental health of students. Additionally, it even raises symptoms respectively stress, depression and suicide; affects negatively to learning and comprehensive development, seriously to values' orientation of students, erodes cultural values and mitigates the quality of family, school and social education. Students who are victims of cyberbullying, affected concernedly to their insurance right in the future.

### **3.3. Policy and service system supports middle school students in countries**

*In foreign nations*, according to Harmful Digital Communications Rules 2016 from Government of New Zealand, the District Court has a new civil process that helps deal with cases where it's alleged someone has or will suffer harm by one or more of the 10

communication principles outlined in the Act, derived of: “If someone has shared intimate recordings, images or videos of you online without your consent, they can be charged with a criminal offence under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. If the individual is found guilty, they may be fined up to \$50,000 or sentenced to a maximum of 2 years in prison. During the case, the judge can make an order for the intimate visual recording to be taken down from where it has been posted online. To report an incident of unauthorized posting of intimate visual recordings, please contact your nearest Police station.” (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2015)

The 193<sup>rd</sup> General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, United States of America, General Laws, Part I, Title XII, Chapter 71, Section 370: School bullying prohibited; bullying prevention and intervention plans; reporting of bullying incident date, declares that: “...b) Bullying shall be prohibited: (i) on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a school district or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school district or school and (ii) at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a school district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing contained herein shall require schools to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying shall be prohibited; (d) (3) Each plan shall recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have 1 or more of these characteristics. The plan shall include the specific steps that each school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school and collaborative school shall take to support vulnerable students and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment. A school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school or collaborative school may establish separate discrimination or harassment policies that include additional categories of students. Nothing in this section shall alter the obligations of a school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school or collaborative school to remediate any discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state or federal law.” (Massachusetts Court System, n.d.)

*In our homeland*, the Constitution (2013) was promulgated by the National Assembly on November 28, 2013. Article 20. Clause 1. Everyone has the right to be physically inviolable, protected by law in terms of health, honor and dignity; not to be subjected to torture, violence, coercion, corporal punishment or any other form of treatment that infringes upon the body, health, honor and dignity; Article 21. Clause 1. Everyone has the inviolable right to private life, personal secrets and family secrets; has the right to protect one's honor and reputation; Article 37. Clause 1. Children are protected, cared and educated by the State, family and society; involved in children's issues. Infringement, torture, ill-treatment, neglect, abuse, labor

exploitation and other acts infringing upon children's rights are strictly prohibited. (The National Assembly, 2013)

Next, the National Program on Child Protection 2021-2030 aims to develop child protection services across the country by 2030. (Government, 2021)

Then, Plan International and Institute of Medicine - Sociology reported the initial survey of the experimental model called Safe, friendly and equal school – Research and Assessment on the situation of gender-based violence in schools of Hanoi, May 2014. (Van, 2016)

In addition, Children Law (2016). Article 54. Responsibility to protect children online. (National Assembly, 2016)

Besides, Circular No. 33/2018/TT-BGDĐT dated December 28, 2018 of the Ministry of Education and Training: Guidelines for social work in schools (Implementation of Decree No. 80/2017/ND-CP). (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018)

Moreover, Decision No. 112/QĐ-TTg dated January 22, 2021 of the Prime Minister promulgating the social work development program for the period of 2021 - 2030. (Article 2. Assignment of responsibility for the implementation of the Program, Section 5. The Ministry of Education and Training shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with relevant ministries, branches, agencies...; improve the quality of social work lecturers and establish a network of social workers and officials in school). (Government, 2021)

And, Decision No. 830/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister dated June 1, 2021 approving the program "National Programme on Child Online Protection for 2021-2025". (Government, 2021)

Thus, the system of laws, policies, services illustrated all over the world above has been promulgated quite a lot in terms of benefits for many subjects in daily life, including secondary school students as cyberbullying victimization.

### **3.4. Support programs mitigate cyberbullying among students**

*Be Internet Awesome* initiated by Google (from 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021 on the website of Google Viet Nam), is the multi – channel program for everyone and built so as to support the best for families, teachers and children about safe and wise Internet-using skills. (Google, 2021)

Additionally, Interland is a free game that belongs to Be Internet Awesome. Interland is most appropriate for kids from 7 to 12 years old. They will play the game on their own to become a smart Internet user. In the game, they will participate in defeating cyber perpetrators. The program was launched in many countries, including Vietnam. Interland can be played on any Internet-connected device with a web browser, for instance, a desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile phone, in specific.

Even more, *You are safer with Google Curriculum* is a cooperation project between Google and iKeepSafe Coalition. It equips teachers with necessary tools and methods for conveying fundamental knowledge about digital safety and citizenship in the classroom. These lessons are designed most properly for students from grade 2 to grade 6. All of them are free and open-access to anyone. Internet users do not need to log in to join the program.

Swipe Safe was a tailor-made training package developed by ChildFund Australia in 2017. ChildFund's Swipe Safe leads to empower for the youth in order to take most advantage of the Internet through educating them about risks online and how to protect themselves, by equipping their parents and teachers to become safe partners online. This project was manifested at 37 schools - 6 districts in 3 provinces of Vietnam. (ChildFund Australia, 2017)

Generally, Vietnam's support programs against cyberbullying for middle school students who are bullied online have been still quite modest compared to ones from foreign

scholars. Due to this shortage, Vietnam needs more our own highly – efficient programs as soon as possible for futuristic young generations.

### **3.5. The role of social work in supporting cyberbullied middle school students**

*In the world*, the result of the study *School Social Workers' Perceptions of Cyberbullying* researched by Karen Slovak and Jonathan Singer (2011) indicated: Social workers at all levels believe that cyberbullying can harm psychology, including suicide and needs solving by social workers. Impacts of school social work are also discussed for solving cyberbullying. (Slovak & Singer, 2011).

*In Vietnam*, the journal article of two authors Nguyen and Vu (2017), *The role of school social workers related to family, community and school system in Vietnam currently*, analyzed the cause, consequence, clarify the current circumstance among students today; analyzed and claimed the vital role and specific strength of school social workers' activities in coordination with family, school system and social community (about the aim, method, model, approach, social work services' supply, interdisciplinary collaboration mechanism...) so as to enhance the efficiency of supporting solutions against students' social issues. (Nguyen & Vu, 2017)

So, these studies have mentioned the role and preponderance of social work in general and school social work in particular in supporting the resolution on cyberbullying among junior high school students.

Overall, the research works of the authors in the world and in Vietnam have mentioned theoretical and practical issues related to students being bullied online.

Most of the research works have introduced the concept of cyberbullying, forms of expression, consequences of cyberbullying; at the same time, identifying cyberbullying as a form of student bullying, school bullying is increasing in the context of digital technology development.

Scholars explore various risk factors associated with cyberbullying, including personal characteristics, family dynamics, peer relationships, school environment, and Internet usage patterns. On the other hand, the researchers also analyzed protective factors that can help decrease negative effects of cyberbullying on students, such as strong social support, school environment with positive pathways and effective response strategies.

Many studies from the perspective of Sociology, Psychology, and Public Health have analyzed and confirmed that cyberbullying is a problem that has serious consequences for mental health, happiness and well-being. victim social activities, which emphasize the importance of prevention and intervention strategies to effectively address cyberbullying. However, research works have not gone into depth to assess the factors affecting the bullying behavior of junior high school students.

## **4. Conclusion**

Studies on cyberbullying and support for cyberbullied middle school students in the world and in Vietnam focus on contents as followed: Concept; Scale; Type; Cause; Consequence of cyberbullying and support interventions under Sociology, Public Health and Psychological Counselling. They also mention the role and the superiority of general social work and particular school social work in supporting solutions against cyberbullying for middle school students. However, there has been no in-depth research on the topic: Social work supports cyberbullied middle school students.

In conclusion, the author continues to suggest Social Work resolutions in order to enhance the efficient support for students as cyber victims at middle schools. Social work

solutions are proposed upon strength-focused perspective, empowerment and capability, confidence enhancement for cyberbullied middle school students. Then, they are proactively able to promote their cognition, attitude, behaviors for prevention and against cyberbullying.

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