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Investigating The Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement In The Relationship Between Callous-Unemotional Traits and Cyberbullying Perpetration

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of online communication technology has given rise to the increasing prevalence in cyberbullying perpetration. Previous investigation has established that callous-unemotional traits are risk factors of cyberbullying perpetration. However, little is known about how each callous-unemotional subconstruct is related to cyberbullying behaviors. Besides, moral disengagement is empirically evidenced to be facilitator of bullying, yet its influence in cyberspace is largely unexplored. In the present study, we examined the associations of each callous-unemotional trait (callousness, uncaringness and unemotionality) with cyberbullying perpetration and the potential mediating role of moral disengagement. We employed a cross-sectional design. A total of 128 emerging adults aged 18 to 29 (32.8% males, 67.2% females, $M = 22.99$) completed questionnaires on their callous-unemotional traits, cyberbullying perpetration, and moral disengagement. The results indicated that out of three callous-unemotional dimensions, only callousness was positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration. The mediating role of moral disengagement in the association between callousness and cyberbullying perpetration was not established. The findings supported that callousness is the most socially disruptive risk factor, meanwhile, the pattern of uncaringness and unemotionality potentially reflect a social norm of emotional suppression in collectivist cultures. Moral disengagement may be rendered unnecessary in virtual contexts due to special online affordances. Implications are that further cross-cultural investigation and adaptation of moral disengagement to capture its features in virtual contexts are required to understand the dynamic interactions among callous-unemotional traits, moral disengagement and cyberbullying perpetration.

Keyword: callous-unemotional traits, cyberbullying perpetration, moral disengagement