

Storytelling for Cyberbullying Prevention in Adolescents: A Literature Review

Abstract

With the rapid advancement of digitalization, adolescents' social interactions have increasingly shifted to online environments. Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by intensified peer influence, identity formation, and high levels of social media engagement, all of which may increase vulnerability to involvement in cyberbullying. In this context, cyberbullying is widely recognized as a significant public health concern. Research indicates that low levels of empathy constitute one of the key psychological factors contributing to cyberbullying behaviors. Accordingly, interventions aimed at enhancing empathy have emerged as prominent preventive strategies. Storytelling is an effective method for fostering empathy, as it enables individuals to experience the events from diverse perspectives and assume different roles. In recent years, school-based interventions incorporating storytelling have been shown to reduce cyberbullying behaviors and enhance empathy levels. In this regard, school health nurses—beyond their role in individual counseling—are well positioned to implement story-based interventions through group education programs and the development of school policies. Accordingly, this review summarizes the literature and provides recommendations tailored to adolescents and school settings, with particular emphasis on the role of school nurses in coordinating storytelling-based prevention strategies.

Keywords: Adolescents, cyberbullying, empathy, school health nursing, storytelling

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Introduction

The rapid development and widespread use of digital technologies have significantly shifted adolescents' social relationships into online environments.¹ During adolescence, peer relationships, identity development, and the need for social approval become central, and online interactions shape daily social experiences.^{2,3} Therefore, adolescents represent a particularly vulnerable group for involvement in cyberbullying within the school context.²⁻⁴ This transformation has created a foundation for the proliferation of cyberbullying, which has emerged as a negative consequence of online interactions. Cyberbullying is defined as the intentional, repetitive, and harmful use of digital tools to engage in aggressive behaviors. Due to its increasing prevalence and adverse effects, it is now recognized as a significant public health concern.² In a systematic review examining the global epidemiology of cyberbullying among adolescents, the prevalence of cyberbullying perpetration ranged from 6% to 46.3%, while cybervictimization ranged from 13.99% to 57.5%; verbal aggression was identified as the most common form of cyberbullying.⁵

Cyberbullying is shaped by multilevel determinants, including peer norms and bystander dynamics, the school environment and reporting mechanisms, and digital affordances such as perceived anonymity.^{1,3,4} It can affect adolescents' mental health and functioning in multidimensional ways, being associated with increased depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as adverse psychosocial outcomes such as loneliness, social isolation, and low self-esteem.^{1,3} Within the school context, cyberbullying has been linked to absenteeism, school avoidance, reduced school connectedness, and poorer academic achievement. It has also been identified as a risk factor for sleep disturbances, psychosomatic complaints, and self-harm tendencies.^{1,3} Cyberbullying possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from traditional bullying. Its potential for anonymity, lack of physical contact, and continuous presence within online environments make it a more complex and covert phenomenon.¹ Moreover, cyberbullying is a multidimensional issue that encompasses not only behavioral aspects but also cognitive and emotional processes.³

A critical psychological variable shaping behaviors in cyberbullying contexts is empathy, which includes both cognitive and affective components.² Empathy refers to the capacity to understand and emotionally share another person's feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The literature indicates that adolescents with higher levels of empathy exhibit a lower tendency to engage in cyberbullying behaviors.^{2,4,6,7} Moreover, structured interventions aimed at enhancing empathy have been shown to be effective in preventing and reducing cyberbullying.² In particular, fostering skills such as emotional awareness, empathy, and adherence to social norms reduces individuals' propensity to engage in bullying and strengthens prosocial behaviors.⁷ In this context, storytelling—an approach that enables individuals to emotionally connect with others' lived experiences—emerges as an effective method for supporting empathy development.⁸

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Storytelling can be readily planned and implemented in both individual and group-based school interventions by practitioners such as teachers and school nurses. School health nurses, in particular, occupy a pivotal role in the storytelling process, serving not only as health counselors but also as educators who promote social and emotional learning.⁹ By integrating storytelling into their practice, nurses can enhance adolescents' empathic awareness, support the development of effective coping strategies against bullying, and create safe learning environments that foster psychosocial resilience.¹⁰

Cyberbullying prevention requires multilevel action across the school community and should be embedded within a whole-school approach to student health and well-being.¹¹ Consistent with global guidance, school health services provide an evidence-based platform for delivering preventive, promotive, and referral-oriented support to students within school settings.¹² In line with contemporary school nursing standards, school health nurses contribute through population-based assessments, health education, early identification and referral, coordination of multidisciplinary responses, and advocacy for safe school policies and reporting mechanisms.⁹ Furthermore, the National Association of School Nurses¹⁰ explicitly identifies school nurses as key professionals in the prevention and intervention of bullying and cyberbullying through education, case identification, referral coordination, and policy-level action. Accordingly, this review conceptualizes storytelling not only as an educational technique, but as a nurse-coordinated prevention strategy that can be integrated into school health services and whole-school prevention frameworks.

This review synthesizes current empirical and theoretical findings regarding the use of storytelling in addressing cyberbullying and provides a scientific foundation for the development of interdisciplinary, evidence-based, and innovative intervention strategies, particularly within the context of school health nursing. The aim of this review is to examine the potential of storytelling as a method for addressing cyberbullying among adolescents, with specific attention to its implications for school health nursing practice.

Search Strategy of This Literature Review

This review synthesizes empirical evidence on storytelling as an approach to cyberbullying prevention among adolescents, with particular attention to implications for school nursing practice. A literature search was conducted for publications published between January 2015 and December 2025 in PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collection. The search strategy combined three conceptual blocks: [1] cyberbullying or bullying; [2] storytelling or story-based educational approaches (including digital and technology-mediated formats); and [3] adolescent populations or school settings, including school health and school nursing. Reference lists of included studies and relevant review articles were screened to identify additional eligible records. To support the public health and school systems framework, targeted web searches were also conducted to identify guidance documents from the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Association of School Nurses.

Records were considered eligible if they addressed bullying or cyberbullying in adolescent or school-aged populations and were substantively related to storytelling or story-based educational approaches, including digital and technology-mediated formats. Evidence was also included when it provided guidance relevant to school health services or school nursing practice in areas such as prevention, early identification, referral pathways, or coordinated school responses. Records were excluded if they were unrelated to bullying or cyberbullying, lacked substantive relevance to story-based approaches or school health nursing implications, or if the full text was inaccessible.

Discussion

This review is organized into four sections: [1] Definition of Storytelling and Educational Functions; [2] Design Principles for Storytelling-Based Interventions; [3] Applying Storytelling to Cyberbullying Prevention; and [4] Integrating Storytelling into School Nursing Practice.

Definition of Storytelling and Educational Functions

Storytelling is a long-standing communication method through which individuals convey experiences, emotions, and ideas within a meaningful structure using oral, written, or digital formats.¹³ As one of the oldest forms of learning in human history,

storytelling not only facilitates knowledge transmission but also communicates values, enables emotional sharing, and supports the internalization of social norms.¹³ Through stories, individuals can make sense of complex events, engage with diverse perspectives, and develop a sense of belonging.¹⁴ In this regard, storytelling is considered a multifaceted pedagogical approach that serves both cognitive and affective learning objectives.¹⁵

Storytelling is widely used to capture adolescents' attention, enhance memory retention, and foster empathy and critical thinking skills.¹⁶⁻²¹ This approach is particularly effective during adolescence, as it promotes emotional and social learning.²² By engaging both cognitive and emotional domains simultaneously, stories support the internalization of knowledge and facilitate attitude change.^{23,24} Storytelling contributes not only to academic learning objectives but also to moral development, values education, and the strengthening of social skills.²⁵ Therefore, it is frequently employed in programs aimed at bullying prevention and empathy training.^{26,27} During adolescence, storytelling may be especially relevant because stories can explicitly address peer norms, reputational concerns, and digital citizenship, factors that frequently shape online aggression and bystander behavior.³

Principles and Recommendations for Storytelling-Based Interventions

Storytelling is a powerful pedagogical tool that holistically engages cognitive, emotional, and social processes. However, for this method to function as an effective intervention strategy, it must be carefully structured.^{13,28}

Stories designed to foster empathy, perspective-taking, and moral reasoning in adolescents should incorporate elements of conflict, resolution, and character development. Such narratives promote identification with characters and stimulate mental state modeling in the listener.^{29,30} The narrative structure of stories should be clear and coherent. A well-defined beginning-middle-end sequence, along with clearly presented characters, conflicts, and resolutions, enables listeners to construct a mental story map that highlights causal relationships. Consequently, compelling narratives can become powerful tools for learning and behavior change.³⁰

Active participation should be a core component of storytelling-based interventions. Adolescents may write their own stories, dramatize them, reconstruct them in digital formats, or modify existing stories. Such participatory approaches facilitate deeper cognitive restructuring and promote empathy development.²² Additionally, elements such as story pacing, tone of voice, impactful messages, and eye contact are crucial. Multimedia-supported storytelling—incorporating video, audio, and text—may further enhance effectiveness, inclusivity, and engagement. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic techniques that address different learning styles can increase participation and strengthen emotional connection.^{31,32}

In storytelling practices that address sensitive themes—such as cyberbullying, social exclusion, or traumatic experiences—it is essential to create learning environments in which participants feel safe and protected from emotional distress.³³ Educators should not only provide opportunities for individuals to share stories but also cultivate a respectful, empathetic, and supportive classroom climate in which emotions can be expressed openly.³⁴ For storytelling-based interventions to be effective, content selection, narrative structure, participation methods, instructional strategies, and ethical considerations must be planned in an integrated manner. This holistic approach transforms storytelling from a mere vehicle for information delivery into a pedagogical tool that fosters empathy, reinforces values, and facilitates inner transformation.

In school-based bullying prevention programs, classroom sessions typically align with standard lesson periods [approximately 30–45 minutes].^{35,36} However, systematic reviews of cyberbullying interventions indicate substantial heterogeneity in both session length and overall program duration. Accordingly, these reviews recommend tailoring the number and duration of sessions to the school's available resources and to the developmental characteristics of the target population.³⁷ To promote safe and effective implementation and support standardization, it is recommended that the school health nurse delivering the sessions complete an initial orientation and brief pre-implementation training. Given the dynamic nature of school environments, ongoing coaching and periodic refresher training should also be available, supported by a structured supervision and monitoring system to maintain quality over time.¹²

The Use of Storytelling in Combating Cyberbullying

Storytelling is a promising approach to addressing cyberbullying, as it enables individuals to engage with others' experiences at both emotional and cognitive levels. However, direct storytelling interventions specifically targeting cyberbullying remain scarce in the literature. Recent reviews indicate that technology-based interventions—such as gamified interactive e-books and scenario- or story-based learning models—can be effective; nevertheless, most studies incorporate storytelling as one component of a broader intervention rather than evaluating it as a standalone protocol.^{37–39} For example, Khan et al.⁴⁰ demonstrated that storytelling practices significantly improved empathy, self-awareness, and social communication skills among primary school students. In a study conducted in China, Shao et al.³⁹ reported that a gamified digital storybook application enhanced students' knowledge of cyberbullying, as well as their problem-solving and self-regulation skills. Similarly, Yang and Lu³⁸ found that a multi-role scenario-based learning model, allowing students to experience the roles of bully, victim, and bystander, fostered empathy and conflict resolution skills. These findings clearly underscore the effectiveness of multifaceted storytelling approaches in fostering empathic experiences. Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis examining interactive story-based digital games reported reductions in bullying behaviors and increases in social-emotional awareness.⁴¹

Through storytelling, individuals can develop awareness not only of the challenges faced by victims but also of the underlying factors influencing the behaviors of those who engage in bullying. This multidimensional perspective shift may promote a conscious effort to transform both victimization and aggressive behaviors.⁴² In this regard, storytelling is considered a powerful pedagogical tool in combating cyberbullying, particularly in relation to communication strategies, values-based transformation, social-emotional development, and empathy education.

School Nursing and Storytelling in Combating Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a prevalent and complex form of digital violence that particularly affects adolescents. Developing effective and sustainable intervention strategies requires interdisciplinary collaboration, with school health nurses playing a pivotal role.⁴³ School health nursing is a public health practice area that encompasses not only the monitoring of students' physical health but also the protection and promotion of their mental, social, and digital well-being.¹² In this context, storytelling emerges as a valuable empathy-based intervention tool that school nurses can implement at the individual, group, and community levels.^{10,44} Encouraging adolescents to create stories based on their own experiences or to engage with real-life stories that allow them to emotionally explore both victim and bully roles may facilitate cognitive-behavioral restructuring.³⁸ Such structured storytelling activities can be integrated into nurse-led group sessions, classroom-based programs, or individual counseling. Evidence syntheses suggest that story-based approaches can support the development of social-emotional competencies and related psychosocial outcomes in adolescents, underscoring their relevance to school health nursing practice.⁴⁴

Storytelling-based programs may also be designed by school health nurses as multilevel interventions targeting not only adolescents but also teachers and parents. For example, in digital content-based intervention programs such as Cyberprogram 2.0 or No-Trap, nurses can assume an active facilitative role by delivering psychoeducational modules, guiding adolescents' emotional responses, and fostering a supportive classroom climate.^{39,41} Digital storybooks, interactive scenarios, and gamified stories incorporated into such programs may capture adolescents' attention and enhance engagement in the learning process.⁴⁵

When working with adolescents who have experienced bullying, social exclusion, or digital violence, nurses hold fundamental ethical responsibilities, including creating a safe learning environment, respecting adolescents' emotional boundaries, and providing referrals when necessary.³⁴ School health nurses possess the knowledge, skills, and ethical competence to design storytelling-based interventions holistically in areas such as empathy development, anti-bullying strategies, and digital safety. Therefore, integrating creative, child-centered, and emotion-focused approaches, such as storytelling, into nursing education programs emerges as a strategic necessity for both safeguarding student health and strengthening professional capacity. These responsibilities call for a structured framework to incorporate storytelling into routine school health services. In this regard, the Public Health Intervention Wheel offers a practical model to guide feasible, multilevel school nursing actions for storytelling-based cyberbullying prevention.

Storytelling-based cyberbullying prevention can be conceptualized within the Public Health Intervention Wheel framework. The Intervention Wheel defines population-based public health nursing practice across individual/family, community, and systems levels and organizes practice according to intervention types rather than service settings.⁴⁶ Within this framework, school health nurses may use school-level monitoring and early identification strategies to inform the development of cyberbullying-related scenarios and to iteratively refine session content. Structured storytelling sessions can be implemented within the health teaching intervention domain. When recurrent patterns or high-risk situations are identified, referral and follow-up, case management, and safety planning may be employed to provide individualized support.⁴⁶ Concurrently, system- and community-level interventions, including consultation, collaboration, advocacy, and policy development and enforcement, can strengthen consistent reporting and response mechanisms across the school community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This review synthesizes current evidence on storytelling as a strategy for cyberbullying prevention and situates this approach within the scope of school nursing practice. By enabling individuals to engage with the emotional and cognitive perspectives of different roles (bully, victim, and bystander), storytelling is recognized as a powerful tool for fostering empathy, facilitating values-based transformation, empowering adolescents emotionally, and promoting adherence to social norms. To enhance nursing-specific applicability, storytelling-based cyberbullying prevention was mapped onto population-based public health nursing practice using the Public Health Intervention Wheel and established school nursing standards. This mapping delineates actionable steps across key domains, including assessment and monitoring, health teaching, counseling and follow-up, referral coordination, and school-wide strategies such as consultation, collaboration, advocacy, and policy development.

In conclusion, storytelling-based cyberbullying prevention represents a feasible and scalable approach that can be integrated into routine school health services under the leadership of school nurses. When implemented across individual-level support, classroom-based education, and school-wide systems, it has the potential to foster empathic responses, reduce the normalization of online aggression, and strengthen bystander intervention and help-seeking behaviors. Future experimental studies should evaluate nurse-led, storytelling-based cyberbullying prevention programs integrated into routine school health services, including follow-up assessments to examine the durability of their effects.

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