

Psychological Resilience and Behavioral Strategies in Conflict Situations Among Adolescents in the Context of Cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT: The contemporary digital environment has intensified adolescent's exposure to cyberbullying, making psychological resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict situations particularly salient. The present study examined the relationship between psychological resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict among adolescents within the context of cyberbullying. Grounded in Maddis theory of resilience and the Thomas "Kilman conflict-handling model, the study explored gender- and age-related differences as well as associations between resilience and conflict behavior.

The sample consisted of 158 adolescents (64.6% female; M age = 14.77) attending public and private schools. Psychological resilience was assessed using the Personal Views Survey III-R, while behavioral strategies in conflict were measured with the Thomas "Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument. Adolescents knowledge and perceptions of cyberbullying were evaluated through a researcher-designed questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analyses.

The results indicated that boys demonstrated significantly higher levels of overall resilience and its components "commitment, control, and challenge" compared to girls. Girls reported more frequent use of avoidance as a conflict strategy. Higher levels of resilience were positively associated with collaboration and compromise strategies and negatively associated with avoidance. No statistically significant age-related differences were identified.

The findings highlight psychological resilience as a key regulatory resource shaping adolescent's behavioral responses to conflict situations related to cyberbullying. The study underscores the importance of resilience-oriented prevention and intervention programs aimed at promoting adaptive conflict management strategies in digital contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary digital environment constitutes a space in which a significant portion of adolescents' social experience is shaped through online interactions, technological media, and the intensive use of social platforms. In parallel with these processes, a growing body of research indicates the increasing prevalence of cyberbullying as a psychosocial risk, the awareness and perception of which substantially influence adolescents' psychological well-being, decision-making, and behavioral strategies (Kowalski et al., 2014; Smith, 2019; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).

International studies consistently demonstrate that the prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescent populations varies but represents a significant psychosocial issue within the contemporary digital environment (Kowalski et al., 2014; Smahel et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2024). Although the international scientific literature extensively examines the consequences of cyberbullying and its associated psychosocial factors (Modecki et al., 2014), evidence within the Georgian context remains limited. Consequently, there is comparatively restricted knowledge regarding the individual and environmental factors that influence adolescents' resilience and the use of behavioral strategies in conflict situations within the context of cyberbullying.

In the contemporary digital environment, cyberbullying is defined as intentional and repetitive harmful behavior carried out through electronic channels, characterized by a power imbalance and a potentially broad audience (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Smith et al., 2008). Its specific features substantially distinguish it from traditional forms of bullying, as online contexts are marked by asynchronous communication, the possibility of anonymity, the rapid dissemination of aggressive content, and the persistent accessibility of harmful attacks (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). This environment generates conflict situations in which the manifestation of resilience and behavioral strategies becomes particularly salient.

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in the conflict-handling modes model (Kilman & Thomas, 1974) and the concept of personal resilience (Maddi, 2002). Behavioral strategies in conflict—collaboration, compromise, competition, avoidance, and accommodation—are shaped by individual personality characteristics and the contextual conditions in which the conflict unfolds. Resilience, in turn, reflects the extent to which adolescents are able to effectively cope with cyberbullying-related

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conflicts, maintain a sense of control, and select adaptive behavioral responses based on their understanding of the situation (Maddi, 2002).

Both approaches represent among the most empirically supported frameworks focusing on individuals' responses to stressors and their regulatory mechanisms. According to Lazarus's transactional model, the experience of stress is determined by situational appraisal—that is, how individuals interpret environmental stimuli, whether they perceive them as threats, harm, or challenges, and the degree to which they consider themselves capable of managing the situation. Due to its constant accessibility, anonymity, and expanded social audience, cyberbullying significantly intensifies the role of this appraisal process. Adolescents may interpret the same form of digital aggression in different ways, which in turn leads to variability in emotional and behavioral responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Maddi's theory of resilience further complements this process by explaining individual differences in resistance to stress and adaptive capacity. Resilience, conceptualized through the components of commitment, control, and challenge, reflects psychological resources that reduce the intensity of threat appraisal and increase the likelihood of adaptive responses (Maddi, 2002). In this sense, resilience functions as a regulatory mechanism that decreases the probability of dysfunctional coping strategies while enhancing adaptive, problem-focused forms of responding.

The integration of these two theoretical perspectives provides a coherent explanation of the research problem. Adolescents' responses to cyberbullying are determined, on the one hand, by how they appraise digital aggression and, on the other, by the psychological resources available to manage the emotional burden arising from this appraisal (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2012). As a result of this interaction, coping strategies do not represent merely automatic behavioral responses; rather, they emerge from the combined influence of appraisal processes and the individual's available regulatory resources (Skinner et al., 2003).

The Present Study

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between psychological resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict situations among adolescents within the context of cyberbullying. Specifically, the study sought to address the following research question: *How are behavioral strategies in conflict related to resilience in the context of cyberbullying?* Within the framework of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. The use of behavioral strategies in conflict will differ by gender: specifically, boys will more frequently employ competition and compromise strategies, whereas girls will more frequently use collaboration and avoidance strategies.

H2. Levels of resilience will be higher among boys compared to girls.

H3. Higher levels of resilience will be associated with lower use of avoidance and accommodation strategies.

1. Method

1.1 Participants and Procedure

The study sample consisted of 158 respondents, of whom 64.6% were female and 35.4% were male. The mean age of participants was $M = 14.77$. Of the total sample, 81.6% were students attending public schools, while 18.4% were enrolled in private schools.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for psychological research. All adolescent participants were informed in advance about the aims, procedures, and conditions of participation in language appropriate to their age and comprehension level. Participants received detailed information regarding their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. They were informed that all data collected would be anonymous, confidential, and used exclusively for scientific purposes. Data processing was carried out in a manner that precluded personal identification.

Prior to participation, written informed consent was obtained from each participant as well as from their legal guardians. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no financial or material compensation was provided.

1.1.2 Research Instruments

- **Resilience measure:** The *Personal Views Survey III-R* (PVS III-R; Maddi, 1998) was used to assess psychological resilience.
- **Conflict-handling styles measure:** Behavioral strategies in conflict were assessed using the *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI; Kenneth W. Thomas & Ralph H. Kilmann, 1974).
- **Assessment of students' knowledge of cyberbullying:** To evaluate students' knowledge and perceptions within the context of cyberbullying, a questionnaire was developed specifically for this study. The instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended questions focusing on forms of cyberbullying, its causes, gender-related aspects, and students' social experiences. The content of the questionnaire was aligned with established theoretical and empirical frameworks grounded in contemporary research (Campbell et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014). The questionnaire was used exclusively for the purposes of this study, and no validation or reliability testing was conducted on other samples, which constitutes a methodological limitation.

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1.1.3 Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis included univariate and bivariate analyses, cross-tabulation analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as the calculation of Pearson's correlation coefficient and the chi-square (χ^2) statistic.

RESULTS

Analysis of the collected data revealed that 67.7% of students reported using a mobile phone, and 37.3% indicated that they use the internet for almost the entire day. According to participants' reports, 44.9% stated that bullying almost never occurs in their immediate environment, 35.4% reported that it occurs rarely, 13.3% sometimes, 5.1% frequently, and 1.3% almost always. With regard to forms of cyberbullying observed in participants' social environments, 84.8% reported that individuals most frequently become victims of cyberbullying in the form of ridicule, while 17.1% identified threats involving the disclosure of private information. The majority of adolescents (87.3%) considered cyberbullying to be a crime, whereas 12.7% did not view it as criminal behavior. In terms of awareness of different forms of cyberbullying, 43.7% of students identified the use of hate speech as the most familiar form, 39.9% reported the publication of photos or videos without the author's consent, and 16.4% indicated the sending of viruses or messages in the form of spam. Regarding gender-related perceptions of cyberbullying victimization, 47.5% of respondents believed that females are more frequently victims of cyberbullying, 2.5% identified males, and 31.0% indicated that both males and females are equally affected. For 19.0% of respondents, the gender of cyberbullying victims was unknown. Concerning perceptions of cyberbullying perpetrators, 8.9% of participants believed that cyberbullies are female, 29.1% male, and 41.1% reported that perpetrators are equally likely to be male or female, while 20.9% indicated that they did not know the gender of cyberbullies. Finally, 56.3% of respondents agreed with the statement that cyberbullying victims may themselves be responsible for the situation, 15.2% disagreed with this view, and 28.5% reported difficulty in providing an answer to this question. To examine age-related differences in resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results indicated that overall resilience scores were highest among 18-year-old adolescents. Within this age group, higher scores were also observed on the resilience subscales of commitment and challenge, whereas the control subscale reached its highest level among 16-year-old adolescents. With regard to behavioral strategies in conflict, the use of the competition strategy was highest among 14-year-old adolescents, collaboration was most prominent among 15-year-olds, compromise among 17-year-olds, and avoidance and accommodation strategies were most frequently used by 18-year-old respondents. However, these differences were not statistically significant ($p > .05$) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents across resilience and conflict behavioral strategy scales by age group
ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age Commitment	Between Groups	(Combined)	151.482	4	37.870	0.346	0.846
	Within Groups		16725.765	153	109.319		
	Total		16877.247	157			
Control Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	74.961	4	18.740	0.271	0.897
	Within Groups		10598.260	153	69.270		
	Total		10673.222	157			
Challenge Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	48.721	4	12.180	0.443	0.777
	Within Groups		4204.374	153	27.480		
	Total		4253.095	157			
Resilience Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	634.340	4	158.585	0.342	0.849
	Within Groups		70932.831	153	463.613		
	Total		71567.171	157			
Competition Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	54.568	4	13.642	1.492	0.207
	Within Groups		1398.977	153	9.144		
	Total		1453.544	157			

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Collaboration Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	11.722	4	2.931	0.931	0.447
	Within Groups		481.367	153	3.146		
	Total		493.089	157			
Compromise Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.614	4	1.153	0.393	0.814
	Within Groups		449.336	153	2.937		
	Total		453.949	157			
Avoidance Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	17.550	4	4.387	1.205	0.311
	Within Groups		557.134	153	3.641		
	Total		574.684	157			
Accommodation Age	Between Groups	(Combined)	8.154	4	2.038	0.388	0.817
	Within Groups		803.017	153	5.248		
	Total		811.171	157			

Based on the results of the analysis of variance, gender-based differences revealed that boys demonstrated higher overall resilience scores compared to girls. Boys also scored higher than girls on the resilience subscales of commitment, control, and challenge. These differences were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

With regard to behavioral strategies in conflict, the results indicated that girls more frequently used the avoidance strategy, and this difference was statistically significant ($p = .037$). Although boys showed higher scores than girls in competition, collaboration, and compromise strategies, these differences were not statistically significant (see Table 2)

Table 2. Gender differences in resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict

Report

Mean

Gender	Commitment	Control	Challenge	Resilience	Competition	Collaboration	Compromise	Avoidance
Female	32.99	27.17	14.68	74.83	4.07	7.04	5.81	7.02
Male	38.04	31.39	16.86	86.29	4.84	7.14	6.02	6.36
Total	34.78	28.66	15.45	78.89	4.34	7.08	5.89	6.78
SIG	0.003	0.002	0.011	0.001	0.128	0.726	0.472	0.037

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Commitment	Between Groups	(Combined)	920.328	1	920.328	8.997	0.003
	Within Groups		#####	156	102.288		
	Total		#####	157			
Control Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	645.698	1	645.698	#####	0.002
	Within Groups		#####	156	64.279		
	Total		#####	157			
Challenge Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	171.914	1	171.914	6.571	0.011
	Within Groups		4081.181	156	26.161		
	Total		4253.095	157			
Resilience Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	4741.576	1	4741.576	#####	0.001
	Within Groups		#####	156	428.369		
	Total		#####	157			

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Competition Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	21.471	1	21.471	2.339	0.128
	Within Groups		1432.073	156	9.180		
	Total		1453.544	157			
Collaboration Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	0.388	1	0.388	0.123	0.726
	Within Groups		492.700	156	3.158		
	Total		493.089	157			
Compromise Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.506	1	1.506	0.519	0.472
	Within Groups		452.443	156	2.900		
	Total		453.949	157			
Avoidance Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	15.866	1	15.866	4.429	0.037
	Within Groups		558.818	156	3.582		
	Total		574.684	157			
Accommodation Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	7.059	1	7.059	1.369	0.244
	Within Groups		804.112	156	5.155		
	Total		811.171	157			

To examine the relationships among the scales used in the study, a correlational analysis was conducted. The results indicated that higher levels of resilience were associated with greater use of collaboration and compromise strategies. In addition, higher resilience was associated with lower use of the avoidance strategy (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlational analysis between resilience and behavioral strategy scales in conflict

Correlations		Commitment	Control	Challenge	Resilience	Competition	Collaboration	Compromise	Avoidance	Accommodation
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	1	.735**	.626**	.922**	0	.188*	.176*	0	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.29
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Control	Pearson Correlation	.735**	1	.701**	.914**	0	.160*	.208**	-.282**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.54	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.16
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Challenge	Pearson Correlation	.626**	.701**	1	.818**	0	.223**	.184*	-.210**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.51	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.47
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.922**	.914**	.818**	1	0	.208**	.211**	-.233**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)									
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158

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	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.82	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.22
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Competition	Pearson									
	Correlat ion	0	0	0	0	1	-.358**	.377**	.278**	-.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.53	0.54	0.51	0.82		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Collaboration	Pearson									
	Correlat ion	.188*	.160*	.223**	.208**	-.358**	1	0	.211**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.00		0.72	0.01	0.10
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Compromise	Pearson									
	Correlat ion	.176*	.208**	.184*	.211**	-.377**	0	1	.229**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.72		0.00	0.39
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Avoidance	Pearson									
	Correlat ion	0	-.282**	-.210**	-.233**	-.278**	-.211**	.229**	1	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00		0.12
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Accommodation	Pearson									
	Correlat ion	0	0	0	0	-.554**	0	0	0	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.29	0.16	0.47	0.22	0.00	0.10	0.39	0.12	
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the statistical analyses conducted, the hypotheses proposed in the study were found to be fully or partially supported. The first hypothesis (H1), concerning gender differences in the use of behavioral strategies in conflict, was partially supported. A statistically significant gender difference was identified only for the avoidance strategy ($p = .037$), with girls demonstrating higher mean scores than boys. No statistically significant gender differences were observed for the remaining conflict-handling strategies. The second hypothesis (H2), which addressed gender differences in psychological resilience, was supported. Both the overall resilience score and its components—commitment, control, and challenge—were significantly higher among male participants compared to female participants ($p < .05$).

The third hypothesis (H3) was partially supported. A significant negative correlation was found between resilience scores and the use of the avoidance strategy in conflict situations ($p < .01$). However, the association between resilience and the accommodation strategy did not reach statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between psychological resilience and behavioral strategies in conflict within the context of adolescents' knowledge and perceptions of cyberbullying. The findings empirically support theoretical models that conceptualize resilience as a central regulatory resource shaping individuals' behavioral responses to social stress and conflict situations (Maddi, 2002; Rutter, 2012).

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The positive association observed between psychological resilience and the use of collaboration and compromise strategies can be consistently explained by Maddi's (2002) hardiness theory, according to which commitment, control, and the perception of challenge determine individuals' active engagement and modes of response in conflict situations. Higher levels of resilience are linked to cognitive appraisal processes in which conflict is perceived as manageable and controllable, thereby increasing the likelihood of selecting constructive behavioral responses (Maddi, 2002). Within the framework of the Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode model (Kilmann & Thomas, 1974), collaboration and compromise represent strategies grounded in the perception of influence over the conflict situation and the active regulation of interpersonal interaction. In line with Maddi's (2002) theory, commitment and control reflect an individual's tendency to view conflict as modifiable through personal agency. The present findings suggest that higher resilience is associated with precisely this cognitive appraisal structure, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of employing collaboration and compromise strategies in conflict situations.

The negative relationship identified between resilience and the avoidance strategy is also theoretically grounded. Avoidance reflects withdrawal from conflictual interaction and is typically associated with lower perceived control and reduced engagement (Kilmann & Thomas, 1974). According to Maddi's (2002) resilience theory, diminished commitment and a reduced sense of control indicate limited psychological resources, which hinder adaptive behavior in conflict situations. The present results are consistent with empirical evidence reported by Masten (2001) and Rutter (2012), demonstrating that lower levels of resilience are associated with avoidance-based, disengaged, and passive forms of responding to conflict.

Analyses conducted across age groups did not reveal statistically significant differences in either resilience or the use of behavioral strategies in conflict. This finding is theoretically plausible, as resilience is conceptualized as a relatively stable psychological construct that depends more on individual resources and accumulated social experience than on chronological age alone (Rutter, 2012). Although descriptive trends may suggest age-related variations, the absence of statistical significance indicates that, within adolescence, age cannot be considered an independent determinant of conflict-related behavioral patterns.

Gender-based analyses indicated that boys demonstrated significantly higher levels of resilience and its components, whereas girls showed a greater tendency toward avoidance in conflict situations. These findings are consistent with studies highlighting gender differences in perceived control and risk appraisal—characteristics that constitute core components of resilience (Maddi, 2002). At the same time, the absence of statistically significant gender differences in collaboration, compromise, and competition strategies underscores that behavioral choices in conflict are more strongly shaped by psychological resources than by demographic factors.

A particularly important aspect of the present study is its focus not on adolescents with direct experiences of cyberbullying, but on adolescents' knowledge and perceptions of this phenomenon. This approach extends the existing literature by demonstrating that resilience functions as a proactive cognitive–behavioral factor that shapes individuals' readiness to respond to conflict situations, including those involving potential digital aggression. This conclusion aligns with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of resilience in the appraisal of threat and the formation of behavioral responses, including hypothetical and anticipated conflict situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Masten, 2001).

LIMITATIONS

The present study is based on self-report measures, which are inherently influenced by subjective perceptions and may increase the risk of socially desirable responding (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Although the study examines adolescents' knowledge and perceptions of cyberbullying, it does not account for direct experiences of cyberbullying or the assessment of long-term behavioral strategies, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences. In addition, the relatively small sample size ($N = 158$), the restricted educational and cultural context, and the imbalance in gender representation constrain the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study indicate that psychological resilience is a significant determinant of adolescents' behavioral strategies in conflict situations within the context of cyberbullying. Higher levels of resilience are associated with the use of constructive strategies—specifically collaboration and compromise—whereas lower resilience is linked to a greater tendency toward avoidance. No statistically significant age-related differences were identified, while gender differences emerged primarily at the level of resilience rather than across the broader range of behavioral strategies.

Overall, the results empirically support the integrated application of resilience theory and conflict behavior models and highlight resilience as a critical psychological resource shaping adolescents' behavioral responses in situations involving digital conflict and cyberbullying.

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