Chapter 6
Cyberbullying in Adolescence:
Victimization and Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the internet has revolutionized the way individuals conduct business, socialize, and search for information on any topic imaginable at any time. Nevertheless, with all its benefits, the internet also has a darker side for which new criminal opportunities have emerged and some traditional crimes have evolved and multiplied. One area of concern that has emerged since the advent of the internet is that of cyberbullying, a distinct type of deviant behavior that has attained worldwide attention from practitioners and scholars. This chapter examines cyberbullying as associated with the age, gender, race, and urbanicity of the victims versus the extent to which traditional face-to-face bullying took place within these same groups. Cyberbullying remains an elusive social problem for all because cyberbullying has been associated with school shootings, suicides, and other violence among adolescents. Discussion of the implications for practitioners and scholars will be included in that cyberbullying extends beyond the school grounds and well within the realm of public safety.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a widely used and internationally familiar form of victimization that had traditionally been perceived to be a common, customary rite of passage, which typically occurs during a child's early middle school to high school years. That is until the past few decades when researchers and practitioners started to look more

closely at the emotional and behavioral ramifications associated with bullying victimization, especially in relation to adolescence (Lusk, 2014). It is widely accepted that most adolescents have encountered, or will encounter, bullying at one or more times during adolescence (Lusk, 2014). Researchers have emphasized that with traditional, face-to-face bullying, adolescents typically assume one of three principal roles that include the bully, the victim, and what researchers and practitioners have deemed to be, the bystander (Lusk, 2014). As noted, up until recent decades, most adults have dismissed bullying as seemingly harmless normal childhood conduct that dissipates in time with both age and maturity. The adage, *kids will be kids,* was a commonly held and widely accepted belief embraced by parents, early childhood educators, school administrators, and criminal justice professionals. However, the apparent lack of knowledge and understanding of bullying accepted by adults over the past years has compelled bullying victims to develop ways to fend for themselves (Lusk, 2014).

In recent decades, there has been a change in basic assumptions in our collective understanding of bullying in that, the behavior is now recognized as a "pervasive social problem that may have a profound influence on the psychological and physiological well-being of the targeted victims" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 224). In fact, incidents of face-to-face bullying have come to be a distinct form of harmful and hurtful emotional and physical abuse that directly and adversely affects over one-third of today's youth, thereby, warranting international concern (National Crime Prevention Council, 2014). Ever since the mass shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, which at the time was the largest school massacre to date, bullying has become a major concern for law enforcement and other public safety organizations (Pittaro, 2008). In response to Columbine and the other mass school shootings that have taken place in recent years, schools and other youth organizations have been tasked with reducing incidents of bullying through preventative and intervention-type programs (Pittaro, 2008). The comprehensive criminal investigation that took place following the bloodbath at Columbine, strongly confirmed the fact that the majority of school shooters were bullied and responded to their victimization through retaliatory actions that were intended to harm the bullies and those who did nothing to prevent such incidents (Casebeer, 2012; Pittaro, 2008; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

To compound matters further, the advent of the Internet and its obvious, vast capabilities to limitlessly transcend well beyond the physical world, has directly contributed to an increasingly growing phenomenon, whereby bullies have moved from the school's physical grounds into cyberspace (Campbell, 2005). Cyberbullying victims, as they are known within the research and practitioner literature, have described this contemporary form of bullying as relentless, inescapable, ruthless, and even more disturbing than traditional forms of bullying because, its potential

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