

Chapter 11

Cyberbullying: The Bad and the Ugly Side of Information Age

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ABSTRACT

Twenty years ago, who would have thought that children as young as twelve would own a cell phone, or people would check their e-mails and Facebook several times in a given day? Things have changed a lot over the last several years. The information and communication technologies made access to information easier and allowed people to communicate with long-distant family and friends instantly. Despite these positive changes, the advances in information and communication technologies also introduced problems that are unique to information age. In this paper, the authors review one of these problems, namely cyberbullying, which affects school age children. Many studies reported significant number of children late elementary through high school experiencing cyberbullying—the use of electronic means to harass others—through cell phones and the Internet. The authors discuss the nature of cyberbullying and why it became a problem among youth. They conclude this chapter with suggestions for parents and future research.

INTRODUCTION

For the last five to ten years, digital media technologies have dramatically changed the way people connect, socialize, collaborate, learn, and work (Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010). The unprecedented levels of connectivity and sharing information in the form of text, images, and videos through personal computers and cell phones have

become a daily routine. A recent Pew Internet and American Life Project report found that 83% of Americans use cell phones to call, text messages, take and send photos, and play games (Smith, 2011). As of August 2011, 78% of adults in the United States use the Internet to send and read e-mails, use a search engine (e.g. google), research a product or service, check the weather, buy products, get news, make a travel reservation, watch a

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video, look for information, download music, and play online games (Pew Internet and American Life Project Report, 2011). Additionally, 65% of online adults use social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn (Madden, & Zickuhr, 2011). Similar patterns are observed in European countries as well. For instance, in the United Kingdom 99% of adults own a cell phone, 74% of adults use the Internet, and 48% of adults have a social networking profile (Ofcom, 2011). Other countries, both in and outside of Europe, are also witnessing a rapid increase in the use of cell phones and the Internet (The World Bank, 2011).

Adults are not the only ones who use digital media technologies regularly. According to recent Kiaser Foundation report, 66% of children (ages between 8 and 18) in the United States own cell phones, and send an average of 118 messages a day. Additionally, children spend almost 1.5 hours everyday using computer and playing video games. Children spend most of their time on the computer visiting social networking sites, watching videos, and sending e-mails and messages (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, 41% of children (ages 9-19) use the Internet for school work, to look for information, play games, send e-mails, and chat with others. Additionally, 50% of children use cell phones and send, and receive text messages daily (Livingstone, & Bober, 2005). According to the recent European Union Kids Online report, children use the Internet daily more frequently than their parents, and 38% of children (ages 9-12) and 77% of children (ages 13-16) have a profile on a social networking site (Livingstone, & Haddon, 2009).

The increase in the access and use of technology has both positive and negative impact on society. Technology provided people new opportunities to connect and communicate. On the other hand, it introduced new problems like harrassment through electronic means, commonly termed cyberbullying. According to NCES report, 6% of children

(ages 12-18) experienced cyberbullying in the form of receiving hurtful information on the Internet and being excluded from an online community (NCES, 2011). In a study conducted with Canadian and Chinese seven grade children, Li (2007) found that 28.9% of children were cyberbullied and 17.8% of children were cyberbullies themselves. Similarly, Arıcak et al. (2008) found that 35.7% of children (grade 6 through 10) in Turkey were cyberbullies and 5.9% of children were cybervictims. In the Netherlands, Dehue, Bolman, and Völlink (2008) found that 23% of secondary school children were victims of cyberbullying. An Anti-Bullying Alliance (ANA) report found that one in five children had experiences with cyberbullying in the United Kingdom (BBC News, 2009). Research findings like these, and many more from other countries all around the world, suggest that cyberbullying among youth is an important problem that needs to be addressed as digital media technologies become ubiquitous.

BACKGROUND

Definition of Cyberbullying

Researchers have identified a wide range of behaviors as cyberbullying and suggested different ways to categorize these behaviors. Broadly speaking, cyberbullying behaviors include flaming (sending or posting hostile messages), exclusion (preventing someone from participating in an online group), denigration (sending messages to others about someone), impersonation (pretending to be someone), sexting (sending pornographic images to someone) and cyberstalking (prolonged harassment that involves intimidation and threats) (Siegle, 2010; Walker, 2009; Willard, 2007). According to Arıcak (2011, p.10), “cyberbullying is technical-oriented or relational-oriented harmful behaviors toward a real person or a corporation by using information and communication technolo-

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