

Chapter 10

Cyberbullying: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Consequences

Michelle F. Wright

Pennsylvania State University, USA & Masaryk University, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

Children and adolescents are actively engaged in a digital world in which blogs, social networking sites, watching videos, and instant messaging are a typical part of their daily lives. Their immersion in the digital world has occurred for as long as they remember, with many not knowing a world without our modern technological advances. Although the digital age has brought us many conveniences in our daily lives, there is a darker side to children's and adolescents' involvement with these technologies, such as cyberbullying. This chapter draws on research from around the world, utilizing a variety of research designs, to describe the nature, extent, causes, and consequences associated with children's and adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying. Concluding the chapter is a solutions and recommendations section in which it is argued that cyberbullying is a global concern, affecting all aspects of society, requiring a whole-community approach.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of youths have fully embraced digital technologies (e.g., mobile phones, the Internet), utilizing these digital technologies daily (Lenhart, 2015). Digital technologies provide many benefits to youths, including the ability to communicate with just about anyone, access to information for leisure and school purposes, and

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entertainment (e.g., watching videos). Although there are many benefits associated with youths' digital technology use, they are also at risk for a variety of negative experiences, such as receiving unwanted electronic content via videos, images, and text, identity theft, using fake or untrue information for schoolwork, and sexual predators. Another risk associated with their digital technology use is cyberbullying.

Defined as an extension of traditional bullying involving bullying behaviors using electronic technologies, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, and text messaging through mobile devices, cyberbullying involves malicious intent to cause harm to a victim or victims (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Grigg, 2012).

The ability to remain anonymous in the cyber context offers flexibility to cyberbullies as they can harm their victims without much concern for the consequences of their actions, due to their ability to mask or hide their identity (Wright, 2014b). Anonymity can trigger the online disinhibition effect which leads some youths to do or say things that they would typically never do or say in the offline world (Suler, 2004; Wright, 2014a). Bullying through digital technologies allows cyberbullies to harm victims in a shorter amount of time. For example, cyberbullies can spread a rumor in the online world in a matter of minutes, while it could take hours for a rumor to spread in the offline world. Cyberbullies can also target victims as often as they like. Victims of offline bullying are able to escape bullying in the sanctuary of their homes, while cyberbullying often follows victims into their homes and other places they perceive as safe. Additionally, cyberbullying can involve the bully and victim only, one bystander, or multiple bystanders. For example, posting a video making fun of someone can receive thousands of watches, whereas being bullied in the lunchroom might only be visible to the individuals paying attention to what is happening. Therefore, the nature of the cyberbullying is somewhat distinctive from face-to-face traditional bullying.

The aim of this chapter is to examine cyberbullying among youths in elementary, middle, and high schools. The studies reviewed in this chapter are from various disciplines, including psychology, education, media studies, communication, social work, sociology, and computer science. This chapter reviews literature with cross-sectional, longitudinal, qualitative, and quantitative research designs to describe cyberbullying. In addition, the chapter draws on studies from a variety of different countries in an effort to provide a more thorough review of the literature. The chapter is organized into the following six sections:

1. Description and definition of cyberbullying: review of the definition of cyberbullying, the types of digital technologies used, the role of anonymity, and the prevalence rates of cyberbullying perpetration and victimization

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