CYBERBULLYING: AN EMERGING ISSUE

BERNADETTE LUCK

Community Strategy Branch
Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Bernadette.Luck@facsia.gov.au
and
School of Education and Community Studies
University of Canberra, ACT

Abstract

Bullying is a common form of youth violence which historically affected young people whilst they were at school, travelling to and from school or in other public places. However, the actual physical presence between a bully and victim is no longer necessary for bullying to occur as it has penetrated into the digital age through what has been termed *cyberbullying* (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as the internet or mobile phones, to harass or harm a victim. As Cyberbullying is only beginning to emerge as an issue, there is an apparent gap in academic literature, particularly in an Australian context. This paper will therefore examine cyberbullying, using traditional bullying as a comparative point of reference, in relation to its effects, prevalence and implications for young people and the Australian community as a whole.

When Katie had a fight with her childhood friend last year, she never thought that it would extend beyond the schoolyard into cyberspace. What initially began as an argument at a birthday party rapidly escalated into a six-month harangue of threatening text-messages, humiliating website posts and abusive emails.

When Anna tried to sign-in to her instant message account she was unable to because an unknown person had accessed her account and was pretending to be her, calling a number of her close friends nasty names and initiating an argument with Anna's boyfriend. To this day Anna is still unaware of the identity of the cyberbully, but as a result of his/her actions she has suffered significantly at school and lost some of her close friends.

Introduction

Imagine a world where there are limited rules, and of these rules few, if any, are actually enforceable. Furthermore, imagine a world where you have the freedom to do or say whatever you like, where you can constantly make up stories, spread rumours and tell lies, most of which are harmful to others and there is no-one there to do anything about it. Welcome to the cyberworld and the new form of bullying known as *cyberbullying*.

Bullying in all its forms is widely accepted as being the most pervasive form of violence among youth and without intervention can inevitably escalate into serious forms of antisocial behaviour (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Bullying historically affected young people whilst

they were at school, travelling to and from school, or in other public places. However, modern technology has allowed bullies to access their victims and transmit bullying behaviours further than the physical world through what has been termed *cyberbullying* (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying is a form of bullying where the perpetrator utilises a form of digital communication, such as the internet or a mobile phone to intimidate, harass and/or harm their victim (Belsey, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Current media reports have provided a number of anecdotes and insight into this new form of bullying and suggests that the problem, although in its initial stages, is having a huge impact on those associated with it. For example, in Australia a Year 11 girl made death threats towards one of her peers on a popular social networking website where she stated that she would bring weapons to school and get revenge on the people who had hurt her. On another website set up by year 7 students, derogatory comments were posted about a number of students and teachers. The website also had a link to a polling page which asked for suggestions on how to hurt a fellow student (McDougall, 2007).

As cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon, there is a definite lack of published scholarly research on the issues specifically pertinent to cyberbullying. There is, however, an array of differences which suggests that cyberbullying may in fact be more serious than traditional forms of bullying (Belsey, 2005; Campbell, 2005; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). Therefore this paper will provide initial background information on the seriousness of cyberbullying, as well as a preliminary look at its prevalence both nationally and internationally. The central aim of the paper is to firstly make visible this new form of cyberbullying and its implications for individuals and Australian society at large. An array of issues which are specific to cyberbullying, such as common characteristics of cyberbullies, the effects of cyberbullying, and possible intervention strategies will be examined using traditional bullying as a comparative point of reference.

The main conclusion drawn from this analysis is that cyberbullying is a major issue of concern affecting a number of young Australians, particularly as technology continues to transform the lives of young people. Further, cyberbullying is an issue that warrants further analysis and consideration, particularly in a public policy context, as cyberbullying has emerged as a significant public health and social problem (Brown, Jackson and Cassidy, 2006).

Defining traditional bullying and cyberbullying

In a sense cyberbullying[1] is an extension of traditional bullying whereby different mediums are utilised to ultimately achieve the same outcome; that being intentionally inflicting some sort of harm, injury or discomfort on an individual (Bamford, 2004). Cyberbullying takes on such forms as harassment, discrimination, outing, flaming, trickery, spreading lies, disclosing personal information, gossiping, spreading rumours or anything else with the intention to destroy the character of the person (Beckerman and Nocero, 2006; Brown *et al*., 2006; Sparling, 2004). This behaviour is always unwanted, deliberate, unremitting and repetitive and is often used as a form of social exclusion (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; School Libraries in Canada, 2006).
The major difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is that traditional bullying requires the physical presence of the bully and victim for the bullying to occur

[1] Given that cyberbullying involves a number of emerging concepts a glossary of terms is found at the end of this paper

(Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). On the other hand, cyberbullying is more pervasive and diverse as it can be written or based on images and utilises various different technological mediums such as telephones, mobile phones and cameras, email, internet chatrooms, personal websites, polling sites, weblogs, online journals and Xangas (personal profiles where young people post hate lists), (Brown, Jackson and Cassidy 2006; NCH, 2005; School Libraries in Canada, 2006; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho and Tippet, 2005).

Three studies have looked at the most common strategy used by cyberbullies. Lenhart (2007) suggests that the most common form is the forwarding or the public post of a private conversation that an individual had with another person. Patchin and Hinduja's (2006) study of 400 young people indicates that cyberbullying occurs most frequently in chatrooms followed by computer text messages and then email. The actual behaviours which appear to most commonly constitute cyberbullying among participants in their study were being ignored online (60%), being disrespected (50%), being called names (30%) and been threatened online (21%). A study by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) among 84 young people, aged between 13-18 years, indicates that the most common form of cyberbullying is via text messaging (32% of victims) followed by bullying via internet-websites (15.5% of victims) and bullying using picture mobile-phones (9.5% of victims). Traditional schoolyard bullying, although sharing some similarities, is not the same as cyberbullying. Importantly, traditional bullying usually involves either one-on-one or small group to one, whereas the ease of cyber-communication means that the bullying can involve large numbers and be very widespread.

Currently there is little research on cyberbullying. By examining research on the correlates of traditional schoolyard bullying it is expected that an understanding of the reality, growth and magnitude of this new form of bullying can be developed (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006).

Although it is being predicted that there is a causal link between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, research on this is very much in its preliminary stage (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Brown and colleagues (2006), whilst examining characteristics of cyberbullies in comparison to traditional bullies, found that those who are bullied through traditional mediums often become bullies online. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) also examined the link between electronic and traditional bullying among 1500, 9-17 year olds in the US and found that being physically hit or teased by another child in the past year significantly resulted in their potential to become bullies online. Furthermore, Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) found that 85% of cyberbully-victims were also classified as traditional bully-victims, and 94% of cyberbullies were also traditional bullies. This suggests a possible causal relationship between the two types of bullying and that bullying often, but not always, starts offline and then continues online (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007; Li, 2005). As the above studies have indicated that cyberbullying, although having a number of differences in the way it is conducted is often linked with traditional bullying, it is critical that we acknowledge this relationship and develop interventions accordingly. In doing so, it is also crucial that we develop a comprehensive understanding of the types of people who are most commonly involved in cyberbullying, both as a bully and a victim.

Who cyberbullies?

Two separate studies suggest that the most common age when cyberbullying occurs is between 15 and 17 years (Lenhart, 2007; Beckerman and Nocero, 2003). The cyberbully is often known to the victim, as studies also indicate that over 70% of victims are aware of the identity of their cyberbully (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; NCH, 2005), who is usually

someone in their class, or someone in the same year but a different class. Bullying is usually carried out by a small group of students (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Smith *et al.,* 2005).

Cyberbullying seems to involve girls more frequently than boys with the typical female to male ratio to be about 3:2 (Finkler, Mitchell, and Wolack, 2001; Li, 2005). This may be explained by the fact that girls are more likely to communicate using text messages and email (Campbell, 2005; Chu, 2005; Keith and Martin, 2005; School Libraries in Canada, 2006). Moreover, the concept of cyberbullying, where the young person does not confront their victim face-to-face is more aligned with the way in which girls communicate their anger (Picker, 2006).

Characteristics of the traditional bully and victim

Characteristically, bullies tend to be aggressive, psychologically extroverted, self-confident (Rigby, Cox and Black, 1997) and have negative attitudes towards their victim (Yoneyama and Rigby, 2006). A common misconception that bullies also suffer from low self-esteem and are unpopular is not substantiated as current research suggests that bullies often view themselves in a positive light and often have many friends (Juvonen, 2005). Males are more likely than females to bully and bullies are more likely to engage in substance abuse, cigarette smoking and have poor academic achievement (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004).

On the other hand, the victim tends to be quiet, introverted, sensitive, lack confidence and may not have many friends (Yoneyama and Rigby, 2006). Victims also tend to be poor academic achievers, prone to alcohol and drug use and experience loneliness, depression and neuroticism (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004).

Characteristics of the cyberbully and cyberbully-victim

Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that overall those who cyberbully were more likely to have poor relationships with their parents, and like traditional bullies, many of them tend to be drug users. This research suggests that a poor relationship/attachment with the primary caregiver was a significant predictor of an individual engaging in online harassment. This may be explained by the individual externalizing his/her behaviours in the form of bullying. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found three psychosocial factors which are common to those who cyberbully: delinquent behaviour, where 37% of frequent internet users who identified as internet-harassers reported engaging in delinquent behaviour compared to 13% of non-internet harassers; a victim of traditional bullying themselves, where 51% reported this, compared to 30% of non-internet harassers; and, substance abuse, where 32% of internet harassers reported frequent substance abuse compared to 10% of non-internet harassers.

Just as there is very limited research on the characteristics of cyberbullies, there is even less on the characteristics of cyberbully-victims. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cyberbully-victims are more likely to be social outcasts and may use the internet to post aggressive condemnations of the students who defame them at school**.** Such cyberbully targets have also been described as the 'wannabes' who are most involved in interacting with their peers online (Willard, 2006).

Why young people cyberbully

Focus groups were conducted by Lenhart in 2006 to determine the motivation behind young people engaging in cyberbullying. These focus groups revealed that bullying someone over

the internet or mobile phones is very easy, particularly because they can harass their victim anonymously. The focus groups also revealed that often cyberbullying is just an extension of what is already happening in the schoolyard, and provides a relatively easy, hassle free way for bullies to continue their harassment outside of school hours.

Further, Beckerman and Nocero (2003) found that the reasons for engaging in cyberbullying ranged from the bully believing it was harmless and funny to the fact that they were more likely to cyberbully because they were confident that they would not be caught or punished. In many ways cyberbullying appears to be an extension of traditional bullying, however, more research is needed to further explore the characteristics and motivations of cyberbullies and their victims.

The prevalence of cyberbullying

In order to contextualise the prevalence of cyberbullying it is first important to understand the uptake of technology by young people and its place in their social development.
Young Australians may be particularly susceptible to cyberbullying via mobile phones, as text messages have been identified as the most common form of communication between young people aged 14-17 years and around 80% of 15- 17 year old mobile-phone owners send instant messages on a daily basis (Brown *et al*., 2006). The Australian Psychological Society (2004) conducted a study on mobile phone usage among adolescents in grades 7-12 found that 83% currently had a mobile phone. Of the participants who owned a mobile phone, 10% of these people reported receiving threatening messages. The most common ages to first receive a mobile phone seems to be between 13 and 14 years (57%).

A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2005) on internet usage and access among 15-16 year old students in a number of countries, found that young Australians are 'among the world's leading users of computers in education…" (Australian Council for Education Research Limited, 2006, p 1), with 94% of the Australian students surveyed having internet access to a home computer for school work and 100% of students reporting access to the internet at school. Activities which young people were most likely to be involved online were also examined. Sixty-nine percent of respondents reported frequent use of electronic communication which includes email and chat rooms (OECD, 2005). Similarly, a study conducted at Flinders University in 2005, with students aged 13-17, years found that over 25% of participants said that they used the internet daily and considered it 'an important part of their lives'. Given young people's uptake of this communication technology, including their apparent reliance on it, and the huge role it plays in their social development, it is not surprising that the experience and prevalence of cyberbullying is at such alarming rates.

Cyberbullying, just like traditional bullying has the potential to inflict serious psychological harm and as with traditional bullying the bullies entire foundation lies in their ability to exhibit power and control over their victim (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Sparling, 2004) whether it be actual or perceived power (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). The very nature of Western culture only contributes to this form of bullying whereby young people are virtually inseparable from their mobile phones and are heavily reliant on their computers (Keith and Martin, 2005). Of course the argument for this would be for the young person to simply turn off their computer or their mobile phone. However, as social acceptance is crucial for a young person's development and the fact that the computer and mobile phone act as a lifeline to their peers, shutting oneself off from their social network is not a desirable option (Belsey, 2005; Keith and Martin, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Most young people endeavor to protect

themselves from compromising their social development, even if it means putting up with being bullied through these mediums (Belsey, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Moreover, life in cyberspace is often not distinguishable from life in the real world and it has been found that "there is no clean separation between the two realms and so specific instances of cyberbullying against a person make their way around the intersected social circles like wildfire" (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006, p 155).

Given the high rates of the use of communications technology among young people, the following findings regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying is concerning. In order to comprehend this high prevalence it is necessary to first examine the current rates of traditional bullying. Traditional bullying is a common experience for young people with current Australian statistics indicating that 20% of children have reported being bullied at least once a week (Rigby *et al*., 1997). The prevalence of bullying in American schools indicates similar rates of bullying where around 30% of young people report being continually bullied (Nansel *et al.,* 2001; Whitted and Duper, 2005). Olweus, one of the most prominent writers on bullying, estimates that overall about 15% of children are affected by bullying in one way or another (Ivarsson, Broberg, Arvidsson, and Gillberg, 2005; Olweus, 1993).

While there is limited research on the prevalence of cyberbullying, one study by Campbell and Gardner (2005) found that over 25% of young Australians whom they surveyed said that they knew someone who had been bullied using technology, 14% had experienced bullying online and 10% had experienced bullying over mobile phone text messages.

Similarly US studies have suggested that approximately 30% of young people have experienced some form of bullying online (Chu, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Lenhart, 2007; Li, 2005). With 11% of the young people admitting to having bullied someone else online (Chu, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Patchin and Hinduja, (2006) also found that of their sample, 47% were witnesses to online bullying and overall 74% of the young people in this study said that they were aware that cyberbullying occurs. Prevalence rates of cyberbullying in the UK are slightly below this rate with the NCH (2005) reporting that 20% of young people having experienced some form of cyberbullying.

Several other American studies have suggested that the prevalence of cyberbullying may be even higher, with over 40% of individuals experiencing it at some time. For example, the National Crime Prevention Council in partnership with Harris Interactive Inc. commissioned a study in 2006 to investigate cyberbullying among 824 middle-upper high school students in the US. This study, and it is perhaps more recent than the others, found that just over 40% of young people in this age range have experienced cyberbullying in the past year. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) examined the relationship between electronic bullying and traditional bullying and found that just under 50% of the participants were victims of cyberbullying and around 72% were victims of traditional bullying. These figures are particularly high and therefore of concern, especially given the high level of technology use and the importance of this technology as a social networking tool amongst young people.

The impact of cyberbullying

Even though a great deal less is known about cyberbullying compared to traditional bullying, there appears to be an array of differences which suggests that cyberbullying is just as, if not more, serious than traditional forms of bullying (Belsey, 2005; Campbell, 2005; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). First and foremost, unlike traditional bullying, victims are unable to escape or retreat from the torment of cyberbullying as it knows no boundaries, borders or

limits and has the ability to transcend the schoolyard (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Keith and Martin, 2005; Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007). Another disturbing component of this type of bullying is that information can be transmitted to a global audience in a relatively short period of time resulting in increased public humiliation (Belsey, 2005; School Libraries in Canada, 2006; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). For example, videos were posted on public, social-networking websites such as *YouTube*, showing Victorian private school students being bullied and beaten up at school (Rout, 2007). Just as with traditional bullying, while the motives behind the actual bullying are the same, with cyberbullying the effects are often magnified (Lenhart, 2007).

The concept of *disinhibition*, a new term coined by Joinson 1998, (cited in Brown *et al*., 2006), may explain why it easier for cyberbullies to engage in such extreme behaviours. Firstly, this form of bullying does not enable the bully to be provided with feedback from their victim in the form of visual or other cues so they are less likely to feel empathy for their victim (Brown *et al*., 2006; School Libraries in Canada, 2006). Secondly, the nature of cyberbullying means that in most instances the perpetrator can remain anonymous by either not disclosing their identity at all, or through the use of fake identities and different online personas (Brown *et al*., 2006). Thirdly, the nature of cyberbullying enables the bully access to previously private areas. For example, mobile phone cameras can be taken into change rooms and photograph's can be taken and then be posted anonymously over social networking or other websites (Berkowitz and Beir, 2005).

Finally, the written or visual impact of cyberbullying can be extremely damaging, as with traditional bullying the memory eventually fades, but having it written down means that the act of bullying itself can potentially last forever (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2005; Brown *et al*., 2006).

Bullying in general is about power and control, however when it comes to cyberbullying this power and control paradigm is somewhat different. Students who would normally be considered weak and who would not normally bully, or would not say such hurtful things to another are more likely to do so online (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Chu, 2005). By sitting behind a computer or mobile phone the bully may feel more protected and a heightened sense of power and control than would be the case with traditional bullying (Beckerman and Nocero**,** 2003)**.** This physical distance not only makes it less likely for a bully to get caught, but also removes the bully from the victim and the impact that their actions are having on them (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007; Keith and Martin, 2005).

What we know from the effects of traditional bullying

The effect of traditional bullying behaviour on the victim can be immense and poses serious threats to childhood and adolescent development through psychological distress, depression and low self-esteem as well as poor psychological adjustment (Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005; Yoon and Kerber, 2003). When young people feel that they have been rejected and socially excluded by their peers a range of maladaptive behaviours can result. Bully-victims often experience social isolation and alienation as a result of being bullied (Lawrence and Adams, 2006**;** Juvonen, 2005; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005; Yoon and Kerber, 2003).

The reason that bullying and social exclusion can be so damaging to the individual is because as an adolescent, our identities are heavily influenced by our social relationships and how others close to us perceive and evaluate us. Bullying is a way in which an individual can be driven out of a social group making them feel socially rejected (Berkowitz and Beir, 2005).

Cranham and Carroll (2003) examined this concept in a recent study and found that the social structure which is present among students in school dictates the behaviours of those students in that environment. They have suggested that if a student does not comply with such structures, which is often the case with bully-victims, then the consequence of this non-compliance will be social isolation and exclusion which brings on an array of different problems. For example, bully- victims are four times more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression than their peers (Dake, Price and Telljohann, 2003). Increased victimisation from peers can also lead to a loss of self- esteem and the development of a poor self concept which often negatively impacts on the victim's school performance (Dake *et al*., 2003; Meadows *et al*., 2005). It has also been found that bully-victims will loose their motivation to cooperate with peers and thus their social isolation will be further extended (Rigby, *et al*., 1997).

It is important to note that the bullies themselves are also likely to experience difficulties in their development and often suffer from such conditions as depression, anxiety, attention deficit-disorder and engage in substance abuse. Bullies are also prone to suicidal ideation and later criminality (Johnson *et al*., 2002; Juvonen, 2005; Lawrence and Adams, 2006; Patchin and Hinduja 2006; Yoon and Kerber, 2003). In fact a study by Olweus (1993) found that 60% of those identified as bullies in adolescence were convicted for at least one crime by the age of 24, compared to 23% of those who were not associated with bullying in any sense.

The effects of cyberbullying

As it has been suggested that cyberbullying is occurring at alarming rates, and is on the increase, it is important to understand the impact that these behaviours are having on young people and the possible consequences of not addressing this issue. Preliminary research suggests that many of the same outcomes for the traditional bully and victim may occur with those involved with cyberbullying; issues such as anxiety, low self-esteem and greater rates of future school drop-out (Patchin and Hinduja 2006). Whilst some people may play-down the effects of cyberbullying on the individual, in that it is not as 'real', continuing evidence suggests that the effects of cyberbullying may be more intense. This may be due to the fact that bullies are more likely to be extreme in their bullying behaviours for reasons discussed previously, such as lack of feedback from the victim and the anonymity cyberbullying enables (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004; Gillespie 2006). As cyberbullying relies on words and images this can, in many ways, be more disturbing and harmful to the victim as there is the opportunity to continually dwell one the hurtful words or images (Australian Flexible Learning; Berkowitz and Beir, 2005). In extreme cases cyberbullying has also been linked to suicide (CBS News, 2004).

There are a few studies which have examined the effects of online victimisation, Finkler, Mitchell and Wolack (2000) surveyed 1500 young people between the ages of 10-17 about their experiences online and found that 32% had experienced some form of stress after being cyberbullied and 31% said that they felt extremely afraid. Furthermore 18% had five or more depressive symptoms at the time of the study. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) found that 60% of cyberbully-victims were affected by behaviours which occurred online when they were at school, 40% felt angry and 27% felt sad about their experiences of cyberbullying. Therefore cyberbullying, as with traditional bullying, may result in further maladaptive behaviours without appropriate social support (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). The effects of cyberbullying are concerning and warrant further investigation. As there is a lack of empirical studies on the effects of cyberbullying for the bullies and victims, more research is needed to determine whether the threats made online are actually carried out in person and whether resulting conditions, such as depression and low self-esteem, are manifested in adulthood.

The economic and societal effects of bullying and cyberbullying

Hu (2004) examined the economic and societal impact of depression and associated disorders in a number of Asia-Pacific countries and reported that the total impact of depression in Australia between 1997-1998, was estimated to be around US$1.8 billion. Overall it appears that the direct cost of depression in Australia, such as physician services and hospitalisation is US$400. A further US$1.4 billion in Australia is spent on the indirect costs associated with depression, such as a loss of productivity.

Self-esteem, the evaluation of ones self-worth, which is also affected by bullying, has been linked to a number of academic, behavioural and psychological outcomes. Some of negative outcomes include teenage pregnancy, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, depression and suicide (Haney and Durlak, 1998; Trzesniewski *et al*., 2006). Trzesniewski and colleagues (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of 1000 adolescents to examine the future consequences of those who experienced low-self esteem in adolescence, and found that they were more likely to develop major depression or an anxiety disorder in adulthood. They were also more likely to experience poor physical health in adulthood.

Furthermore, young people with low self-esteem were 1.5 times more likely to be involved with criminal behaviour in adulthood and have fewer economic prospects, such as being twice as likely to leave school early.

The above research indicates that overall the impact of such conditions as depression, anxiety and low-self esteem have negative economic and societal consequences for those individuals and Australia as a whole. As these conditions have been shown to be partly, if not entirely caused by bullying, then investing in prevention and intervention programs would therefore be in the best interest of individuals and the Australian community as a whole (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005; Yoon and Kerber, 2003).

Addressing the issue of cyberbullying

There have been a number of lessons learnt from traditional bullying such as the fact that bullying is based on an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Smith *et al.,* 2005; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005) and if left unchecked can escalate into more serious forms of violence (Whitted and Duper, 2005). Also, in addressing bullying it is most effective to adopt multilevel strategies where interventions are targeted at the bystander, individual, family and policy and legal levels (Whitted and Duper, 2005). This can be done by developing appropriate anti-cyberbullying policies and through awareness raising and cyber-safety education. All of these lessons must be acknowledged, and in the case of interventions they should be continued, however, there are also issues that are specific to cyberbullying. The digital world is a world in which there are limited rules, few of which are actually enforceable which implies a lack of accountability and responsibility on behalf of many users. It makes sense that the reason cyberbullying has arisen so quickly is partly due to the fact that until just recently there has been virtually no adult supervision or monitoring of the content of websites or text messages in the cyberworld (Belsey, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja 2006; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). This lack of monitoring and supervision is largely related to the fact that parents and children relate to technology quite differently (Chu, 2005; Fleming and Rickwood, 2006; Keith and Martin, 2004). Parents in general see computers and mobile phones as practical tools, whereas young people see them more as a social medium that they can utilise to communicate with their friends (Keith and Martin, 2004). Young people have grown up with technology and can often navigate around the digital world much better than

their parents. This has created a distinct gap between adults and young people's online skills- a gap which the young person is often well aware of (Keith and Martin, 2004; Patchin and Hinduja 2006). Berson (2000), surveyed a 10,000 girls between 12 and 18 years in regards to online safety and found that there is a lack of supervision in the cyber-world where 38% rarely discusses, and 31% never discusses their online activity with an adult.

Despite a lack of adult involvement, the degree to which technology impacts on young people, and whether or not their adventures in the cyberworld are educational, enjoyable and beneficial or are actually destructive and problematic, depends largely on the influence of parents and teachers and their ability to deter young people from engaging in such anti-social behaviours (Berson, 2000; Fleming and Rickwood, 2006).

Another major problem in holding the cyberbully accountable is that it is often extremely difficult to determine the source of this negative behaviour as in most cases the perpetrator is anonymous. Furthermore, it is common for young people to share their screen names and passwords with each other (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Belsey, 2005; Sparling, 2004). Even if the source of the bullying is known the negative behaviours are not necessarily transferred to the schoolyard which makes it difficult to determine the role the school can play in alleviating this behaviour. In many cases this may mean that the school has no authorisation to actually hold a cyberbully accountable for their behaviour (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003 Chu, 2005; Meadows *et al*., 2005). Furthermore, with the right to free-speech it is also difficult to remove a website or material posted on a website (Li, 2005). At present there are no restrictions on what can be posted online and internet service providers are not liable for the content which their users post (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Chu, 2005; Sparling, 2004).

Although there have been reported cases where police and internet/ mobile phone providers have intervened in a cyberbullying incident, this is rarely the case (Bamford, 2004). Legally cyberbullying would most likely be considered a *Communications Offence* which is "to send an obscene, indecent or menacing communication or one that is grossly offensive" (Gillespie, 2006, p 126). However, to be considered as this type of offence it needs to be threatening, or have the intention of creating some type of fear in the victim that pre-empts an uncomfortable situation (Gillespie, 2006).

Interventions

The realistic goal of any intervention should be a reduction in bullying, not eradication and this will require a substantial amount of resources. This can be done by adopting a holistic approach to prevention and intervention by involving parents, teachers, youth workers and other community members who are in direct contact with young people(Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Berkowitz and Beir, 2005; Li, 2005).
Cyberbullying by its very nature is extremely difficult to control. Therefore adopting a disciplinary approach will not be particularly effective, because there is less likelihood that the perpetrator will be identified (Bamford, 2004). A behavioural approach to prevention would be much more effective, where measures are focused on building 'internal reliance' and character education (Bamford, 2004; Berkowitz and Beir, 2005).

Education, supervision and monitoring are all key aspects in cyberbullying prevention (Bamford, 2004). Education programs need to ensure that they provide young people with the right information for them to understand the dangers of cyberbullying and how to minimise its occurrence and also to educate those who think that cyberbullying is harmless (Gillespie

2006). School policies need to be established which clearly outline which technological mediums are actually permitted on campus and have stringent guidelines for their use. Schools should be able to access a device on their premises if there is an indication it has been used to cyberbully (Beckerman and Nocero, 2003; Willard 2006; Wolfsberg, 2006).

Effective policies and resulting strategies which have been shown to alleviate bullying in its traditional sense, (eg. Olweus, 1993), need to be expanded so they include cyberbullying and the various forms that it takes (Brown *et al*., 2006). This would of course include education about the dangers of new technologies (Berkowitz and Beir, 2005; Willard 2006).

Parents and teachers must develop an understanding of new technologies as well and ensure that they are aware of the extent to which cyberbullying is occurring in their children's school environment. It is also important for parents to familiarise themselves with the most common methods used to cyberbully so that the can intervene appropriately (Li, 2005; Patchin and Hinduja 2006).

Implications for public policy

Public policy issues are centred around conflicts between freedom of speech of the child, the best interest of the child and the parents' protective authority and control over the child (Brown *et al*., 2006). For any policy to be effective it must take into consideration the child in relation to their environment, particularly the influence of the child's family, school and community as a whole (Wolfsberg, 2006). Furthermore, policy interventions need to be flexible, continuous and may need to be extended beyond the physical boundaries of the schoolyard (Campbell, 2005).

An additional stage in policy analysis is to examine the local sites where the policy is to be implemented and thus adopt a 'grass-roots'[2] approach. This approach enables those who will be directly affected by the policy to contribute to its development (Brown *et al*., 2006). When drafting policy initiatives on cyberbullying, policymakers must become familiar with the extent and severity of cyberbullying in Australia and the resulting mental, physical and academic effects which typically arise from the act of cyberbullying (Brown *et al*., 2006). At the governmental level, higher administrative policy will need to be established which defines the problem and also takes into consideration the impact of the policy in different arenas (Brown *et al*., 2006). Furthermore, public policy will need to be adaptable to changing social contexts and must be developed in a manner that ensures it alleviates, not exacerbates the problem. Finally, in order for informed public policy to be created, policymakers must establish a thorough understanding of the reality and uniqueness of cyberbullying (Brown *et al*., 2006).

Conclusion

Initial research has indicated that this new form of bullying, known as cyberbullying, has the potential to become as problematic, if not worse than traditional bullying (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Campbell, 2005). The large percentage of young people, who are currently experiencing cyberbullying, and the similarities between the findings of a number of studies examined in this paper, suggests that the issue of cyberbullying is becoming a major concern

---

[2] Grass-roots' approach is an approach that is driven by the community itself rather than traditional power-structures.

and further analysis is required. Both policymakers and the public must commit to investing in public health prevention and other intervention programs to address cyberbullying.

Future research should focus on examining the extent to which cyberbullying is occurring in Australia and the general characteristics of cyberbullies, including the development of appropriate intervention strategies to address this issue. By conducting additional research a, better understanding of the uniqueness of cyberbullying will be established, which will ultimately enable recommendations to be made to government. The severe economical and social consequences that may result from government and other policymakers in responding inadequately to the issue of cyberbullying have been outlined above. It is therefore critically important to act now.

Overall this paper concludes that cyberbullying is an issue facing young Australians and its incidence is occurring at an alarming rate as we move into the wired world. It is hoped that this paper has highlighted the issue of cyberbullying, generated discussion about what can be done and has inspired other researchers to take an interest in this new phenomenon.

G L O S S A R Y

Bullying: "An act of aggression against another person who is either physically and/or psychologically weaker than the perpetrator" (Olweus, 1993, p 9). These acts of aggression include harassment, teasing, taunting, physical violence or social exclusion.

Bully-victims: An individual who is a victim of a bully.

Cell phone: (See mobile phone).

Chatroom: Real-time communication between two users via a computer. Once a chat is initiated, either user can enter text by typing on the keyboard and the entered text will appear on the other user's monitor (Belsey, 2005).

Cyberbullying: Using a personal computer to send harassing emails or instant messages, post obscene, insulting and slanderous messages to online bulletin boards, or develop web sites to promote and disseminate defamatory content. Also, harassing text messages can be sent to the victim via mobile phones (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Cyberworld: Refers to the world of computers and other forms of communications. It implies the fast-moving, high-technology world of today.

Cyberspace: Refers to the 'space' of computer systems and networks and where electronic data is stored and online communication occurs.

Cyberstalking: Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear.

Denigration: Sending or posting gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.

E-mail: The abbreviation term for 'electronic mail'. It acts as both a storehouse and a means to which an individual can compose, send and receive information though electronic communication.

Exclusion: Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group.

Flaming: Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.

Harassment: Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages.

Impersonation: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships.

Instant messaging: A type of internet communication service which enables an individual to establish a private conversation with another person which allows them to talk in real time. It is usually coordinated through a personal contact list where an individual will be alerted if someone on there list is online and they can then start a conversation (Jupitermedia, 2007).

Mobile phone: A handheld portable phone which operates via a central station which makes connections through standard telephone lines.

Outing: Sharing someone's secrets, embarrassing information or images online.

Personal polling/voting websites: A type of website which is set up by an individual that requests other internet users to vote or rate a particular issue or subject, for example www.freevote.com.

Personal websites: A type of website which is set up by an individual as opposed to a business or organisation. The individual can post and update information on the website freely.

Public post: To include something on a website, such as text or graphics, that anyone who goes to that website can see.

Screen names: Often referred to as a nickname, which allows an individual to keep their identity private online.

Social development: A process an individual goes through to develop their thinking and relationships with other people. Social development theories focus on the relationship between the mind and social behaviours (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2006).

Social networking websites: Websites that enable anyone to establish a virtual community of people who share the same interests and activities. There are a number of ways in which users can interact on such sites which include through email, instant messaging or discussion groups

Technology: The technical means people use to improve their surroundings. It is also the knowledge of using tools and machines to do tasks efficiently (Bergen County Technical Skills, 2007).

Text messages or SMS: The process whereby and individual can send a short, often abbreviated message to another person's personal device such as a mobile phone or pager.

Trickery: Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online.

Weblog: A website that has a number of entries, usually organised in reverse chronological order, which is frequently updated with new information on specific topics. A weblog can be authored by the website-owner or other users of that website.

Website: A location on the World Wide Web. Each website contains a home page and often has links to other documents and/or files. A website can be controlled by an organisation, business or an individual (see personal website).

Xangas: Personal profiles where young people post hate lists.

Youtube: A popular website that allows anyone to post short videos for public viewing

REFERENCES

Australian Council for Education Research Limited, 2006. Media Release- Australian students among the highest users of computers at school and in the home: OECD report . Retrieved September 2, 2007 from: http://www.acer.edu.au/news/2006.html

Australian Flexible Learning Framework. (2005). *21st century bullying.* Retrieved February 2, 2007, from: http://pre2005.flexiblelearning.net.au/newsandevents/features/featuresjuly05.htm

Australian Psychological Society.(2004). Psychosocial impact of mobile phone use amongst adolescents. *InPsych highlights*, *December.*

Beckerman, L. and Nocero, J. (2003). High-tech student hate mail. *The Education Digest, 68,* 37- 40.

Belsey, B. (2005). *Cyberbullying: an emerging threat to the 'always on' generation*. Retrieved February 2 2007, from: http://www.cyberbullying.ca/

Bergen County Technical Skills. (2007). *Definition of Technology.* Retrieved August 2, 2007 from: www.bergen.org/technology/defin.html

Berson, M. J. (2000). The computer can't see you blush. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, Summer,* 158- 162.

Berkowitz, M. and Beir, M. (2005). *Character, bullying and the cyber-world.* MindOH! Foundation. Retrieved February 2 from: http://mindohfoundation.org/partner.htm

Bamford, A. (2004). *Cyber-bullying.* Melbourne: AHISA Pastoral Care National Conference.

Brown, K. Jackson, M. and Cassidy, W. (2006). Cyber-bullying: developing policy to direct responses that are equitable and affect this special form of bullying. *Canadian Journal of Education Administration and Policy, 57,* 1-12.

Campbell, M. (2005). Cyberbullying: An old problem in a new guise? *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 15,* 68-76

Campbell, M.A., and Gardner, S. (2005). *Cyberbullying in high school*. Manuscript in preparation.

CBS News. (2005) Cyber-bullying Growing. CBS Interactive Inc. Retrieved September 2, 2007 from: http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/21/earlyshow/living/caught/main68187.shtml

Chu, J. (2005). You wanna take this online? *Time, 166,* 52-55.

Cranham, J. and Carroll, A. (2003). Dynamics within the bully/victim paradigm: a qualitative analysis. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 19,* 113-132.

Dake, J., Price J. and Telljohann, S. (2003). The nature and extent of bullying at school. *Journal of School Health, 73,* 173-180.

Fleming, M. and Rickwood, D. (2004). Teens in cyberspace: do they encounter friend or foe? *Youth Studies Australia, 23,* 46- 52.

Finkler, D. Mitchell, K. and Wolack, J. (2000). *Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth.* National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Retrieved August 12, 2007 from: http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/ResourceServlet?Languagecountry=en_USandPageId=869

Finkler, D. Mitchell, K. and Wolack, J. (2001). *Highlights of the Youth internet safety survey*. Retrieved August 12, 2007 from: http://www.cyberbullying.us/

Flinders University (2005). News and Research stories, *Chat rooms: help needed*. Retrieved August 3, 2007 from: http://www.flinders.edu.au/news/newsarticle.cfm?newsID=E10B0619-B9C5-0AED-A52D-CC97263FAD4C

Gillespie, A. (2006). Cyber-bullying and harassment of teenagers: the legal response. *Journal of social welfare and Family law, 28,* 123-136.

Haney, P. and Durlack, J. (1998). Changing self-esteem in children and adults: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 27,* 423-433.

Hu, T. (2004). The economic burden of depression and reimbursement policy in the Asia Pacific region. *Australasian Psychiatry, 12,* 11-15.

Ivarsson, T., Broberg, A., Arvidsson, T., and Gillberg, C. (2005). Bullying in adolescence: psychiatric problems in victims and bullies as measured by the Youth Self Report (YSR) and the Depression Self-Rating Scale (DSRS). *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry, 59,* 365 373.

Johnson, H., Thompson, M., Wilkinson, S., Walsh, L., Balding, J. and Wright, V. (2002). Vulnerability to Bullying: teacher-reported conduct and emotional problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship difficulties, and prosocial behaviour in primary school children. *Educational Psychology, 22,* 553-556.

Jupitermedia (2007). *Instant messaging.* Retrieved from: http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/I/instant_messaging.html

Juvonen, J. (2005). Myths and facts about bullying in schools. *Behavioral Health Management, 25,* 36-40.

Keith, S. and Martin, M. (2005). Creating a culture of respect in a cyber-world. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 14,* 224-228.

Lawrence, G. and Adams, F (2006). For every bully there is a victim. *American Secondary Education, 35,* 66-71.

McDougall, B. (2007). Mobiles are shaping cyber bullying. *The Daily Telegraph.* Retrieved August 30, 2007 from: http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,22237464 5007146,00.html

Meadows, B., Bergal, J., Helling, S., Odell, S., Piligian, E., Howard, C., Lopez, M., Atlas, D. and Hochberg, L. (2005). The web: the bully's new playground. *People, 63,* 1-1.

Lenhart, A. (2007). *Cyberbullying and Online Teens*. Pew Internet and American Life Project. http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/216/report_display.asp

Li, Q. (2005). New bottle but old wine: a research of cyberbullying in schools. *Computers In Human Behaviour,* Article in Press.

National Crime Prevention and Harris Interactive Inc. (2007). *Teens and Cyberbullying.* Retrieved June 12, 2007 from: http://vocuspr.vocus.com/VocusPR30/Temp/Sites/2623/7920332a403243e6915ba5e2a62c712/FINAL%20Cyberbullying%20Report.doc

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, W.J., Simons-Morton, B., and Scheidt, P. Bullying Behaviors among US youth prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 285,* 2094-2100.

NCH (2005). Putting U in the picture: mobile bullying survey 2005. Retrieved April 15 from www.stoptextbully.com

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Are Students ready for a technology-rich world.* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Olweus, D. (1993). Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 35*, 1171–1190.

Picker, L. (2006). The new danger online. *Good Housekeeping, 242,* 1-1.

Patchin, J.W. and Hinduja, S. (2006) Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: a preliminary look at cyberbullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 4,* 148-169.

Raskauskas, J. and Stoltz, A. (2007). Involvement in traditional and electronic bullying among adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 43,* 564-575.

Rigby, K., Cox, I. and Black, G. (1997). Cooperativeness and bully/victim problems among Australian school children. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 137,* 357 368.

Rodkin, P., Farmer, T., Pearl, R. and Van Acker, R. (2006). They're cool: social status and peer group supports for aggressive boys and girls. *Social Development, 15*, 175-204.

Rout, M. (2007). Urgent call to tame cyber delinquents. *The Australian.* Retrieved August 12, 2007 from: http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,21961419-2702,00.html

School Libraries in Canada. (2006). Cyberbullying: Understanding and Preventing Online Harassment and Bullying. *Canadian School Libraries, 25,* 17-22.

Sparling, P. (2004). Mean machines. *Current Health, 2,* 1-1.

Smith, P., Mahdavi, J., Carvalho, M. and Tippett, N. (2005). *An investigation into cyberbullying, its forms, awareness and impact, and the relationship between age and gender in cyberbullying.* London: Anti-bullying Alliance.

Smokowski, P. and Kopasz, K. (2005). Bullying in School: an overview of types, effects, family characteristics and intervention strategies. *Children and Schools, 27,* 101-109.

Trzesniewski, K. H., Donnellan, M. B., Moffitt, T. E., Robins, R.W., Poulton, R. and Caspi, A. (2006). Low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poor health, criminal behavior, and limited economic prospects during adulthood. *Developmental Psychology, 42,* 381-390.

Whitted, K. S. and Duper, D. R. (2005). Best practices for preventing or reducing bullying in schools. *Children & Schools, 27,* 167-175.

Willard, N. E. (2007). *Cyber-safe kids, cyber-savvy teens, cyber-secure schools.* Centre for Safe and Use of the Internet. Retrieved August 12, 2007 from: http://www.cskcst.com/professionals/

Wolfsberg, J. (2006). Student Safety from Cyberbullies, in Chat Rooms and in Instant Messaging. *The Education Digest 33*-37.

Ybarra, M. L. and Mitchell, K. J. (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: associations with caregiver-child relationships, internet use and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence, 27,* 319-336.

Yoneyama, S., and Rigby, K. (2006). Bully/victim students and classroom climate. *Youth Studies Australia, 25,* 34-41.

Yoon, J. and Kerber, K. (2003). Bullying elementary teachers' attitudes and intervention strategies. *Research in Education, 69,* 27-35.