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Cyberbullying and Youth

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INTRODUCTION

Increased use of technology among youth has both positive and negative consequences. Through the use of technology, young people are exposed to new ideas and have quick access to knowledge. But this technology has also led to different forms of bullying. Through social media, texting, and other methods of mass communication, taunting messages can be sent more easily and to a wider audience than ever before. A national study estimates that 13.5 percent of youth have either electronically bullied others or been bullied at school electronically at least once in the last two months. While rates for verbal (53.6%), social (51.4%), or physical bullying are higher (20.8%), the rate for electronic bullying is substantial and growing (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). The study found that boys are more involved in physical or verbal bullying, and girls are more involved in social bullying. In addition, boys are more likely to be cyberbullies; girls are more likely to be cyber-victims.

Cyberbullying is often considered to be less harmful than traditional bullying because it does not involve physical abuse (Cross, 2009). However, current literature suggests that "covert bullying," such as cyberbullying, may "result in more severe psychological, social, and mental health problems than overt bullying" (Cross, 2009, p.xix). In addition, covert bullying is more damaging than overt bullying because it "is more difficult for schools and parents to detect but also has the capacity to inflict social isolation on a much broader scale" (Cross, 2009, p.xix).

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Cyberbullying is distinct from traditional bullying.
2. Cyberbullying is a common practice among youth today.
3. The youth who are both perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying are often different from those who are involved in face-to face bullying.
4. The psychological and harmful consequences of cyberbullying are similar to those of face-to-face bullying.

DETAILS ON RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

Cyberbullying is distinct from traditional bullying.

Cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon (Jager, Amato, Matos, & Petosa, 2010). Technology enables many different behaviors—including taunting, harassment, stalking, and exclusion—through different forms of communication, such as text, picture and instant messaging, social media sites, and chatrooms. The behaviors may be repeated, as in traditional bullying, but even a single video of a person may be seen by many people, causing serious harm (Grigg, 2010).

Cyberbullying is a common practice among youth today.

In 2007, a survey reported that in the previous month, 30% of middle schoolers had been victims of at least one form of cyberbullying, while 22% had engaged in cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). A 2009 Canadian study found that almost half of middle and high school students had been victims of cyberbullying, while more than a third had been perpetrators (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010). Differences in percentages may be due to different cyberbullying definitions and samples surveyed.

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The youth who are both perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying are often different from those who are involved in face-to face bullying.
Boys and girls equally participate in cyberbullying (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010). However, cyberbullies are not necessarily the same young people who engage in face-to-face bullying. One study of high school behavior (Erdur-Baker, 2010) revealed that for boys, traditional bullies are much more likely to engage in cyberbullying. However, many participants are both victims and perpetrators, a phenomenon that has been reported in many studies but not fully explained.

The psychological and harmful consequences of cyberbullying are similar to those of face-to-face bullying.
Research is beginning to focus on the effects of cyberbullying on youth. Patchin and Hinduja (2007) studied cyberbullying among middle school students and found that both victims and perpetrators have lower self-esteem than youth who have never experienced cyberbullying, and victims have lower self-esteem than the perpetrators. Both victims and perpetrators, but especially victims, were found to be more likely to have suicidal thoughts and behaviors. This data is comparable to the findings of research on traditional bullying, which shows negative psychological outcomes for victims and either excessively high or excessively low self-esteem for perpetrators.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Cyberbullying is a new problem affecting today's youth that differs from traditional bullying because it involves technology instead of face-to-face aggression. Cyberbullies are not necessarily the same young people who bully their peers in school, and many youth are both victims as well perpetrators. But everyone involved experiences negative psychological consequences.

Prevention and intervention practices need to be established wherever youth spend time, including school, home, and other youth centers. Cyberbullying is difficult to target and manage because technology is available to youth whenever and wherever they are near computers or cell phones. Keeping this technology away from young people isn't realistic; therefore, other ways of dealing with the issue must be created. Studies can provide prevention suggestions for schools, communities, and families (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). Young people, youth workers, educators, and parents should be educated about the consequences of cyberbullying.

In schools, cyberbullying is a complex issue that encompasses such legal questions as free speech, harassment, and the schools' authority over off-school behaviors that affect the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Schools can intervene when actions off-campus disrupt learning or threaten other students, and must create policies within their legal rights to protect youth. These guidelines can be applied to other settings where cyberbullying might affect young people, such as after-school programs, youth centers, and recreation programs.

AREAS WHERE ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IS NEEDED

Current prevention and intervention techniques are largely being borrowed from knowledge about traditional bullying. Research shows that cyberbullies are different from traditional bullies, but their reasons for bullying are not yet understood. Early studies looked at the freedom that Internet anonymity can bring, but recent research has indicated that this has little effect on youth behavior. Until additional research on the causes of cyberbullying is done—particularly among those who do not bully face-to-face—youth practitioners cannot be sure that they are using the best possible methods to prevent cyberbullying.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Stop Cyberbulling http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/parents/youth_empowered_solutions.html

Please share your thoughts about this research brief at http://bit.ly/YDIresources

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