

Forum:	General Assembly 3
Issue:	The protection of underage individuals to prevent cyberbullying and abuse
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Introduction

Cyberbullying and abuse refer to bullying and abuse through cyberspace, the location where Internet users interact. Cyberbullying and abuse can be witnessed in the forms of online stalking, harassment, threats, defamation invasion of privacy, sending threatening or abusive text messages, creating or sharing embarrassing images or videos, setting up hate sites or groups about a particular person and encouraging self-harm.

In 2018, 34% of middle and high school students reported to have been the victim of cyber bullying during their lifetime, while 60% of those students reported that it has immensely impacted their ability to learn (Hinduja, 2018). Although this form of bullying is relatively new, it already has a tremendous impact on school aged children, likely because of the popularity of the Internet in school aged children. As of 2018, 95% of teenagers in the US have access to the Internet, commonly on mobile phones (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).

With such a widespread impact on underaged individuals, one must ask why cyberbullying and abuse is such a prevalent issue. According to Richard Donnegan in his article *Bullying and Cyberbullying: History, Statistics, Law, Prevention and Analysis*, in a highly competitive social and academic environment, one student may feel the need to get ahead, in a sometimes corrupt manner. A bully may start by pressuring for assignment answers and spreading social rumors, but will soon realize the effectiveness of the tactics and eventually develop a habitual use of them. Such a process can be much quicker and easier to complete, as a cyberbully can mask his or her identity behind a computer will prevent the bully from the social consequences of their actions.

Definition of Key Terms

Bully/Intimidator

A bully is a person who uses abusive measures to attain his or her own goals. This word can be traced as far back as the 1530s (Harper, 2008). A person could become a bully due to both social and academic difficulties.

Victim

The victim is the target of a bully's abusive actions. Victims of bullying are more prone to self-harm and nearly two times as likely to attempt suicide (John *et al.*, 2018). Victims of cyberbullying and abuse are also closely linked to depression, academic difficulties, anxiety, low self-esteem, family problems, delinquency and school violence.

Bystander

A bystander is a person who does not take part in, but witnesses the act of bullying. In cyberbullying for example, a bystander can be someone who is in a group chat where someone is being bullied. Bystanders may make the victim feel even more alone, because the witnesses to the act do nothing. Bystanders can be prevented from interjection because of the fear of retaliation or other negative social consequences (Gordon, 2018).

Upstander

An upstander is a bystander who chooses to involve himself or herself in an instance of bullying by standing up for the victim. The support of even just one upstander could make a difference in the experience of a victim, as they become less anxious and depressed compared to those who do not have anyone standing up for them (stopbullying.gov).

Cyberspace

Cyberspace is an amorphous, virtual world of the Internet. First used by American-Canadian author William Gibson in 1982 in his science fiction book to describe a “computer network in a world filled with artificially intelligent beings”, the pop culture of the 1990s has since changed the term “cyberspace” as to define the location where Internet users interacted with each other (Zimmerman & Elmspak, 2017).

Cyberbullying and abuse

Cyberbullying and abuse both refer to the online bullying and abuse, taking the traditional forms of verbal, physical and social bullying into the Internet context (Ben-Joseph).

Background Information

Rise of the Internet

In 1965, two computers in a MIT lab communicated with each other via a packet-switching technology. The term *Internet* was born in 1973 when the University College of London (England) and the Royal Radar Establishment (Norway) connected to the American ARPANET, making global networking a reality. By 1991, CERN had introduced the World Wide Web to the public. Social media, the place where the most cyberbullying and cyber abuse by underage individuals takes place, was not slow to follow.

Social Media

The first site we would recognize as social media was *Six Degrees*, created in 1997 where users would upload profiles and make friends online via text and pictures. Fast forwarding to the present, we now have innumerable social media sites and apps that allow us to connect to others at the click of a button.

Bullying

Bullying has long been a problem amongst underage children. Cases of it first appeared in literature as early as 1838 in Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist*, with the first official report appearing in 1862 in London (Gilmour). In the following years, research and laws surrounding bullying were enacted. Up to this point, the bullying done in schools were face to face. Children generally did not face the consequences at home. But by the year 2000, cyberbullying had become an issue.

Cyberbullying and abuse

As virtual connections between people became stronger and more prevalent, cyberbullying and abuse became an epidemic. Students were not safe after they had left school, because their phones and laptops travelled with them everywhere. The pressure on these victims of bullying often led to cases of depression, lack of self-confidence and worth, and self-harm.

Key Issues

Consequences

Like the traditional forms of bullying, there are many negative consequences in cyberbullying to the victim, both the bully as well as the bystanders.

The Victim

The victims of cyberbullying and abuse commonly face issues such as health complaints, decrease in academic achievement and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, loss of interest in former hobbies and changes in sleeping and eating schedules. Girls are more susceptible to self-harm, while boys are more prone to substance abuse and violence. Furthermore, compared to children who have not been exposed to cyberbullying, victims of cyberbullying report higher levels of depression, thoughts of suicide, as well as greater emotional distress, hostility, and delinquency (stopbullying.gov, 2017).

The Bully

Though the fault of the act of bullying resides in the bullies themselves, bullying can also negatively impact them. Poor performance in school due to suspensions, increased truancy and substance abuse risks, and difficulty in retaining social relationships. In the long run, they are also more likely to be less educated and employed and may develop actions of domestic abuse in the future.

The Witness

Largely ignored, the witnesses are also prone to similar negative consequences. Some studies show that children who witness bullying are just as psychologically at risk as the bully or victim (Gordon, 2018). Up to 85% of cyberbullying takes place in front of witnesses, but fear of retaliation and social consequences as well as uncertainty in their next actions can prevent a bystander from becoming an upstander (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). The “Bystander Effect” for example, shows that when a large group of people witness bullying, as is commonly the case for cyberbullying, they tend to not do anything as they feel that standing up for the victim is the responsibility of everyone else. Long after the bullying has ended, bystanders can feel guilt from their inaction (Gordon, 2018).

Prevalence of Online Bullying and Abuse

The amount of students that have been exposed to cyberbullying can range from a low of 5.5% to 72%. This could be due to the easy access of school-aged children to devices that connected them online. Thus, the age-old practice of bullying duplicated itself into the world of cyberspace. The reason for the prevalence of cyberbullying would therefore be very similar to the reasons for bullying in the real world. Bullying is now not thought of as a mental disorder or disorder of conduct of any kind, but rather attributed to an evolutionary instinct to be the best and the strongest.

Major Parties Involved and their Views

State

As previously mentioned, numerous countries have passed laws against online defamation, harassment and disregard of consent. For example, Keely Houghton, 18, was convicted of cyberbullying in the UK and subsequently jailed for three months after posting threatening messages on Facebook (prevent.ca). Civil law does not offer any jail time or other punishments, but criminal law does. In Canada, criminal harassment is punishable by up to 10 years in jail, whilst defamatory libel is punishable by up to 5 years.

School

Many schools now have systems to report bullying, which can end in disciplinary actions by the school. Educational and awareness sessions are also increasingly common. School rules or codes of conduct also prohibit discrimination of sex, race, nationality, belief, as well as harassment, violence and threats of any kind.

EndCyberbullying.org, (ETCB)

ETCB is an organization that shares stories of cyberbullying victims in order to prevent it. Sharing the stories of the victims are a solution to end all forms of bullying, because then the bully can see the impacts of their actions.

StompOutBullying.org

StompOutBullying.org is a helpline that offers virtual support for victims. This can prevent some of the negative impacts of bullying such as self-harm.

StompOutBullying.org

StompOutBullying.org offers online bullying prevention courses complete with post-course assessments and evaluations. This can help others recognize and step in to prevent bullying.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date <i>MM/DD/YY</i>	Description of Event
1990s	The traditional forms of bullying transferred to the internet in the 1990s when cheap computers and internet access became increasingly common.
April 20 th , 1999	Columbine School Shootings, two teens went on a shooting spree, killing 13 people and wounding another 20 before committing suicide, making it the most fatal shooting at the time in US history. Investigators later realized that the two students, Eric Harris (18) and Dylan Klebold (17) belonged to a group of social outcasts known as the Trench coat Mafia, and it is speculated that the shootings were retaliation for being bullied. This case caused many states to pass anti-bullying laws.
October 17 th , 2006	Megan Meier was a 13-year-old girl who committed suicide after her neighbors had created a fake online Myspace social media profile to under the name of “Josh Evans” in order to harass her. The bullies were found guilty of conspiracy and unauthorized computer use, but were later acquitted. Afterwards, Meier’s home state Missouri passed a harassment law in regards to bullying. Now, there is also an anti-bullying organization that operates in her name.
2000s	Numerous self-harm and suicide stories later, new laws and awareness is being spread, primarily through schools, to school-aged children in order to prevent against cyberbullying.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In Canada, there are legal consequences for bullying. Categorized under both civil and criminal law, laws against cyberbullying cover defamation, creating unsafe environments,

harassment and disregard of consent (prevent.ca). Similar laws against different aspects of cyberbullying are also present in different states in the US as mentioned above. Although the majority of these laws have not been in place for long, it is clear that cyberbullying is still a big issue today, and it is not getting any better. For these laws to take effect, the bullying must be severe enough for someone to report it to legal officials, and therefore would not help the victims suffering from everyday bullying in more minor forms. Although laws against bullying provide a punishment for cyberbullies, a solution closer to the root of the problem is needed.

In another perspective, many schools now have bully reporting systems or other preventative measures which can lead to a bully being dismissed from sports teams or suspended from school. This can be a huge help for the victims solely when focusing on the aspect of the bully, but there could be other social retaliations. Victims or people who are trying to help the victims could be labelled as “tattle tales” and face further exclusion.

Possible Solutions

Both solutions above are works in progress and should be seen as such. They have not yet finished developing in to a full-fledged state where they will serve to the maximum intended benefit. When formulating resolutions, try to improve existing solutions as well as create new ones.

As with any other issue, knowledge and widespread education is crucial to tackling it. Although there is already information sessions regarding bullying in general at school, its importance is hardly stressed. If a properly designed and emphasized in school well-being curriculums, the occurrence and consequences of cyber bullying could be decreased. For underage individuals, the influence of parents also holds high importance in the behavior of their children. Therefore, try not to limit the education of cyberbullying to be only targeted towards children, but also family and friends.

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