

Chapter 6

Cyberbullying: Description, Definition, Characteristics, and Outcomes

Michelle Wright
Pennsylvania State University, USA

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 recommendation section in which it is argued that cyberbullying is a global concern, affecting all aspects of society, requiring a whole-community approach.

INTRODUCTION

Children and adolescents have fully embraced electronic technologies (e.g., cell phones, the Internet), with millions of them utilizing these technologies daily (Lenhart, 2015). Through electronic technologies, children and adolescents engage in a variety of behaviors, including communicating with friends and family, looking up information for leisure and school purposes, and watching videos. Despite the benefits of their electronic technology utilization, children and adolescents are also at risk for being exposed to unwanted electronic content through videos, images, and text, identity theft, and sexual predators.

Another risk associated with electronic technology usage is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as an extension of traditional bullying involving bullying behaviors using electronic technologies, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, and text messaging through mobile devices (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Grigg, 2012). The ability to remain anonymous in the cyber context offers flexibility to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2616-2.ch006

cyberbullies as they can harm their victims without much concern with the consequences of their actions due, to their ability to mask or hide their identity (Wright, 2014b). Furthermore, the anonymity afforded by the cyber context can trigger the online disinhibition effect in which youths might do or say things to others that they would never do or say in the offline world (Suler, 2004; Wright, 2014a). Bullying others through electronic technologies also allows cyberbullies to target their victims more quickly (e.g., it may take hours for a rumor to spread in the offline world but it could take less than a minute for it to spread in the online world), as often as they want (e.g., in traditional school bullying the victim can go home to escape the bullying but in the online world bullying can follow the victim home), and to involve a variety of other people or bystanders in the cyberbullying situation (e.g., posting a video online can receive thousands of watches).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine cyberbullying among children and adolescents from elementary, middle, and high schools. Drawing on research from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, education, media studies, communication, social work, sociology, and computer science, this chapter is organized into seven sections, including:

1. **Description and Definition:** An explanation of the definitions, electronic technologies used, the role of anonymity, and the prevalence rates of cyberbullying involvement
2. **Characteristics and Risk Factors Associated with Children's and Adolescents' Involvement in Cyberbullying:** Description of the research on the predictors of these behaviors
3. **The Outcomes Associated with Children's and Adolescents' Involvement in Cyberbullying:** A review of the research findings concerning the psychological, behavioral, and academic consequences resulting from youths' cyberbullying involvement
4. **Theories:** Description of the social cognitive theory and the online disinhibition effect, and how these two theories apply to cyberbullying
5. **Solutions and Recommendations:** Suggestions for prevention and intervention programs, and public policy recommendations
6. **Future Research Directions:** Provides recommendations for future research aimed at understanding and preventing children's and adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying
7. **Conclusion:** Closing remarks about the current nature of the literature on cyberbullying.

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 DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is defined as children's and adolescents' usage of electronic technologies to hostilely and intentionally harass, embarrass, and intimidate others (Smith et al., 2013). Critical to this definition is hostility and intentionality, which highlights the requirement that these behaviors must be intentionally and maliciously harmful to qualify as cyberbullying. Like traditional forms of face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying includes repetition and an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. The

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/cyberbullying/183387

Related Content

The Moodle Distance Learning Platform Usage by Tunisian University Teachers Under the COVID-19 Context

Amira Sghariand Fatma Bouaziz (2022). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-moodle-distance-learning-platform-usage-by-tunisian-university-teachers-under-the-covid-19-context/297621

Enhancing Independent Living Through School Psychological Support

Ilias Vasileiadisand Evangelos Vlachos (2025). *Tools for Promoting Independent Living Skills in Individuals with Disabilities* (pp. 49-66).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/enhancing-independent-living-through-school-psychological-support/360934

Fuzzy Logic Usage in Emotion Communication of Human Machine Interaction

Zhe Xu, David Johnand Anthony C. Boucouvalas (2006). *Encyclopedia of Human Computer Interaction* (pp. 227-233).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/fuzzy-logic-usage-emotion-communication/13127

Mobile Health in Emergency Care

Waddaa Redha, Kirsten Hartwickand Neal Sikka (2015). *Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior* (pp. 825-838).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/mobile-health-in-emergency-care/130196

Human Factors in Organizational Design and Management of Industrial Plants

Brian M. Kleinerand Hal W. Hendrick (2008). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 113-127).

www.irma-international.org/article/human-factors-organizational-design-management/2920