

## Chapter 5

# Cyberbullying: A Negative Online Experience

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this literature review is to describe youths' involvement in cyberbullying. The term "youths" refers to individuals in elementary school, middle school, and high school. The chapter begins by providing a description of cyberbullying and the definition of cyberbullying. The next section describes the characteristics and risk factors associated with youths' involvement in cyberbullying. The third section focuses on the psychological, social, behavioral, and academic difficulties associated with youths' involvement in cyberbullying. The chapter concludes with recommendations for schools and parents as well as recommendations for future research. The chapter draws on research utilizing quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, cross-sectional, longitudinal, and cross-sequential designs, and those from various disciplines, including psychology, communication, media studies, sociology, social work, and computer science.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Millions of youths have fully embraced digital technologies such as mobile phones and 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 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, becoming a victim of identity theft, using fake or untrue information for schoolwork, and encountering 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, or can additionally involve one bystander or multiple bystanders. For example, posting a video making fun of someone can receive thousands of views, 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 traditional face-to-face bullying.

The aim of this chapter is to examine cyberbullying among youths in elementary school, middle school, and high school. 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

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