

Chapter 2

Background

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present the background for the research described in this book. They describe the problem of cyberbullying in general, with specific reference to its status quo in Japan. They also describe some of the most relevant previous research done on the topic of cyberbullying detection and point out research gaps that they aim to fill with this book.

CYBERBULLYING: A SOCIAL PROBLEM

The problem of harmful and offending messages on the Internet has existed for many years. One of the reasons such activities evolved was the anonymity of communication on the Internet, giving users the feeling that anything can go unpunished.

However, scientific conceptualization of the problem, officially defining it and labelling as cyberbullying is a recent step. As for the definitions, various organs and institutions define the problem in their own words, although all definitions represent a general consensus. For example, the National Crime Prevention Council of the US defines that CB happens “when the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person” (NCPC, n.d.). Another definition says that cyberbullying “involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others” (Belsey, n.d.).

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Some of the first robust research on CB was done by Hinduja and Patchin, who performed numerous surveys about the subject in the U.S. (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). They found out that the harmful information may include threats, sexual remarks, pejorative labels, or false statements aimed to humiliate others. When posted on a social network, such as Facebook, Twitter, or an Internet forum, it may disclose humiliating personal data of the victim defaming and ridiculing them personally.

Around the years 2009-2011 a number of large scale questionnaire studies and social campaigns have been conducted to measure the degree of occurrence of cyberbullying and work out methods to mitigate the problem. For example, Cross et al. (2009) in Australia found out that cyberbullying in Australian schools happens for about five to eight percent of children depending on their school year (Cross et al. 2009). Comparable results have been noticed in United States (Kowalski & Limber, 2007), Finland (Sourander et al., 2010), and across Europe (Hasenbrink, 2011). Hasenbrink et al. (2009) present even larger estimates, that even one in five young people (not limited to school environment) have had experienced bullying or harassment through the Internet or mobile devices. These estimates are also confirmed in Qing (2007), Pyżalski (2012), and more recently by Kann et al. (2014).

Cyberbullying has also been thoroughly studied and analyzed by Dooley, Pyżalski, and Cross (2009), who performed an in-depth comparative analysis of traditional face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying, while Lazuras et al. (2012) discussed implications of cyberbullying for teachers in school environments.

Especially Dooley, Pyżalski, and Cross (2009) point out some of the similarities, between traditional face-to-face bullying, but also mention some of the differences making cyberbullying in some aspects a problem more difficult to contain. As for the similarities, which contribute to classifying the problem as a kind of bullying, there are such features as: *peer group*, such as classmates in face-to-face bullying and friends from groups on Social Networking portals (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), which in reality often overlap, and play a crucial role in victimization of bullying targets; *repetitiveness* of bullying acts, which especially with the use of Internet can occur more often than face-to-face bullying; or *imbalance of power*, meaning that usually one person, or a small group of people become bullied by an overwhelming number of bullies. This is also a feature distinguishing bullying from other types of cyber-aggression.

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