The Nature of Cyberbullying Among Youths

Michelle F. Wright

Penn State University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Millions of youths use electronic technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet, daily (Lenhart, 2015). These technologies allow youths many opportunities, such as the ability to communicate with just about anyone, quick access to information for leisure and homework purposes, and entertainment (e.g., watching videos). Despite the positives associated with electronic technology use, many youths are at risk for exposure to problematic online situations. Such situations might involve viewing unwanted electronic content through videos, images, and text, which contains gory or sexually graphic content. Problematic online situations also include experiencing identity theft and being targeted by sexual predators. Cyberbullying is another risk associated with youths' electronic technology use.

Defined as an extension of traditional bullying, cyberbullying involves being targeted by negative and unwanted behaviors via electronic technologies, including email, instant messaging, social networking websites, and text messages via mobile phones (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Grigg, 2012). The anonymity of the cyber context allows cyberbullies greater flexibility to harm their victims without having to witness the reactions of the victims and/or experience any negative consequences as a result of their actions (Wright, 2014b). Cyberbullies' ability to remain anonymous is made possible by the ability to mask or hide their identity in cyberspace. Because youths can remain anonymous online, anonymity can trigger the online disinhibition effect. The online disinhibition effect is when youths do or say something to others that they typically would never do or say in the offline world (Suler, 2004; Wright, 2014). Another component of electronic technologies is the rapid transmission of communication. Because electronic technologies have such a feature, many cyberbullies can target their victims more quickly. For example, a rumor in the offline world might take several hours to spread around school, while in the online world, this rumor could take a matter of minutes to spread to various classmates. Bullies can often target victims as often as they want as it is difficult to escape bullying in the online world as the behaviors can follow the person almost anywhere there is electronic technology access. Although it is possible to have many bystanders for traditional school bullying, cyberbullying has the potential to reach an audience of millions. These individuals can then perpetuate the cycle of cyberbullying by further sharing cyberbullying content (e.g., videos, pictures) with others.

The aim of this chapter is to review the topic of cyberbullying among youths, who might include children and adolescents from elementary school to high school. The literature reviewed includes studies from various disciplines, such as psychology, education, media studies, communication, social work, sociology, computer science, information technology, and gender studies. These studies might also include cross-sectional, longitudinal, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research designs. The chapter also draws on various studies across the world to conceptualize cyberbullying as a global health concern. The chapter includes seven sections, including:

1. **Background**: Contains the definition of cyberbullying, the various characteristic behaviors, the various electronic technologies, the prevalence rates of cyberbullying, and the role of anonymity in perpetrating cyberbullying.
2. **Youths' Characteristics and Risk Factors:** Reviews the factors associated with youths' involvement in cyberbullying as perpetrators and/or victims.
3. **Negative Psychosocial and Academic Outcomes:** Explains research findings regarding the psychological, social, behavioral, and academic consequences associated with youths' cyberbullying involvement.
4. **Theoretical Framework:** Provides an overview of the social cognitive theory and the online disinhibition effect, and their application to cyberbullying.
5. **Solutions and Recommendations:** This section describes suggestions for prevention and intervention programs aimed at reducing cyberbullying involvement among youths, and public policy recommendations.
6. **Future Research Directions:** Explains various recommendations for future research aimed at understanding youths' involvement in cyberbullying.
7. **Conclusion:** Highlights closing remarks regarding the current nature of the literature on cyberbullying.

BACKGROUND

Smith and colleagues (2013) defined cyberbullying as youths' use of electronic technologies to harass, embarrass, and intimidate others with hostile intent. The "hostile intent" portion of the definition is a requirement for a particular behavior or behaviors to qualify as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can also include repetition and an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim, similar to the traditional face-to-face bullying definition. In cyberbullying, the bully might target the victim multiple times by sharing a humiliating and embarrassing video or text message to one person or multiple people (Bauman et al., 2013). It might also include only sending a message to someone once. Another opportunity for repetitiveness might be sending a video or a text message to one person and then that particular person shares the content again with another person or multiple people, who then again share the content with someone else. Repetitiveness of cyberbullying captures the potentially cyclic nature of this form of bullying.

The electronic technology component of the cyberbullying definition separates this form of bullying from traditional face-to-face bullying (Curelaru, Iacob, & Abalasi, 2009). Examples of cyberbullying include sending unkind, mean, and/or nasty text messages, chat program messages, and emails, theft of identity information, pretending to be someone else, making anonymous phone calls, sharing secrets about the victim by posting or sending the secret to someone else, tricking someone to share a secret and then spreading the secret around, spreading nasty and/or untrue rumors using social networking websites, threatening to harm someone in the offline world, or uploading an embarrassing picture or video of a video who does not want the image shared (Bauman et al., 2013). Many cyberbullying behaviors are similar to those perpetrated or experienced in the offline world, such as experiencing/perpetrating harassment, insults, verbal attacks, teasing, physical threats, social exclusion, gossip, and humiliation.

Cyberbullying behaviors can occur through a variety of technologies, such as social networking websites, text messages via mobile phones, chat programs, online gaming, creation of a defamatory website against someone, and making fake social networking profiles using someone else's identity (Rideout et al., 2005). Another type of cyberbullying includes happy slapping, which involves a group of people

Related Content

Investigating Cybercrime in Nigeria
Mufutau Temitayo Lamidi (2020). *Encyclopedia of Criminal Activities and the Deep Web (pp. 1018-1033).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigating-cybercrime-in-nigeria/248101

Killers on Campus: Mass Shooters in Higher Education
Michele W. Covingtonand Tracey L. Woodard (2020). *Handbook of Research on Mass Shootings and Multiple Victim Violence (pp. 156-174).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/killers-on-campus/238572

Predictive Analytics: A Novel Approach to Early Prevention of Human Trafficking
Kristen J. Harrisand Hannabeth Franchino-Olsen (2022). *Paths to the Prevention and Detection of Human Trafficking (pp. 85-105).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/predictive-analytics/304612

A Penchant for Murder: The Case Study of John Wayne Gacy
Gianna M. Strube (2023). *Cases on Crimes, Investigations, and Media Coverage (pp. 221-226).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-penchant-for-murder/313708

SNA as an Integrative Framework: A Holistic Approach to the Study of Organized Crime
Alice Airola (2020). *Handbook of Research on Trends and Issues in Crime Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Victim Support (pp. 187-210).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/sna-as-an-integrative-framework/241471