

# Chapter 18

## Understanding Cyberbullying and Where We Go From Here

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Cyberbullying has become a recent threat to the K-12 age group over the past couple of decades. Per the author, this chapter addresses ways to define cyberbullying, the history regarding when it emerged and current societal challenges, recognition and advancements of regulations, and the introduction of local laws, challenges with enforcing regulations, and recovery efforts to ensure students can move forward in a healthy and safe school environment. There are a few case studies throughout the chapter that demonstrate the dangers of cyberbullying and further exemplify the aforementioned points. Finally, the chapter offers information that allows readers to grasp the concept of cyberbullying, understand the current state of affairs and determine how each individual, including students, parents, school employees, and others, can play a role in recognizing, addressing, and preventing this issue.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that began to gain attention at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with online messaging programs. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2014), approximately 34% of students have reported the experience of cyberbullying. Additionally, 90% of students have found that cyberbullying is a common problem among young people (Hinduja, 2018a). Continued research has provided the understanding that cyberbullying is a behavior that mainly affects school-age individuals and therefore, will be the focus of this chapter. Although some adults experience cyberbullying, the research in that area is limited and workplace bullying is a stronger focus for adults rather than those under the age of 18 (Piotrowski & King, 2016). Unfortunately, bullying is another behavior that school-age individuals experience with nearly 1 in 5 (21%) students reporting this information (NCEC, 2018). Both bullying and cyberbullying can lead to increased anxiety, sleep difficulties, depression, lower grades, self-harm and suicide (Center for Disease Control, 2018). It is useful to clearly understand the differences between bullying and cyberbullying.

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## ***Understanding Cyberbullying and Where We Go From Here***

Although bullying and cyberbullying are topics that have both received increased attention over the past decade, both are different, and the distinction highlights how cyberbullying tends to impact youth more. There is a difference between what adults experience and how they are protected and what the youth are experiencing and how they are protected. Andrea Adams (1992), from Great Britain, was one of the first pioneers to address that bullying is a problem in the workplace and bring it to the forefront for the nation and world to notice. According to Adams (1992), bullying in the workplace has to do with repeated mistreatment that leads to psychological, emotional, and physical distress. Although workplace bullying has been defined differently by many researchers, after extensive research, it is defined here as repeated mistreatment of an employee that includes social exclusion, isolation, not greeting, ignoring the victim's presence, humiliation, demeaning, belittling, excessive deadlines, excessive monitoring of work, few or no tasks, threats, insults, and criticisms, all which may lead to high levels of stress and other health-endangering factors (Ricks, 2015). This definition does not include physical abuse, which includes behaviors that have escalated beyond workplace bullying and into workplace violence such as hitting, punching, shoving, and the like (Vickers, 2002). Although workplace bullying is a serious infraction that has been more widely researched since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been even more attention focused on cyberbullying, which has been affecting school-age children and some adults in the workplace. Seeing as though cyberbullying impacts both youth and adults, the attention to this topic has received even greater attention.

Although, workplace bullying is not the focus of this chapter, this foundation provides the groundwork for how cyberbullying could also be threatening and dangerous to many. The remainder of this chapter will focus on these themes: 1) defining cyberbullying, 2) history, 3) the main focus of the chapter, 4) law, and 5) solutions, recommendations, and the future.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **What is Cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that has taken many by surprise and has risen to public view rapidly based on the effect it has had on school-age individuals. The behavior was initially introduced in the United States in 2003 following the suicide of, 13-year old, Ryan Halligan (Raatma, 2013). Halligan's father, John P. Halligan, completed extensive research to determine what led his son to take his own life, given the fact no note was left behind (Halligan, 2009). He discovered homophobic instant messages that further led him to learn that his son was also being bullied in-person at school. Mr. Halligan has been advocating for the prevention of cyberbullying ever since and succeeded in lobbying for legislation in Vermont. Vermont officials have passed a Bullying Prevention Policy Law and a Suicide Prevention Law, in 2004 and 2005 respectively, that requires teachers and others to recognize and report what they see and hear regarding behaviors that could lead to cyberbullying and/or suicide (Connections eMagazine, 2009).

According to Mr. Halligan's findings, cyberbullying consists of negative messages sent via instant messaging (Halligan, 2009). He found that cyberbullying could lead to suggestions about suicide. Although Ryan spoke to his father about suicide regarding a bad report card, Mr. Halligan spoke against the idea and did not imagine his son would go through with such an act (Halligan, 2009).

Aside from this initial discovery of cyberbullying, many researchers have studied the issue and developed additional definitions. According to Koehler and Weber, (2018) cyberbullying concerns modern

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