

# Adolescent Cyberbullying: A Worldwide Concern

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the burgeoning number of research conducted, along with intervention programs developed, cyberbullying continues to be a serious public health concern that affects children, adolescents, and adults. Cyberbullying affects children and teens particularly since they increasingly rely on information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, etc.) and engaging in numerous internet-based activities, such as playing games, seeking information, and communicating with friends. Although numerous benefits of social media on adolescent development have been documented, such as greater connections with peers, identity development, and aspirational development (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011; Uhls, 2015), social media can also open them up to cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and sexual predation via cyberspace—all of which undermine their safety and psychological wellbeing (Tokunaga, 2010).

Cyberbullying, in particular, is a problem at home, in classrooms, schoolyards, and public areas (e.g., internet cafés). In schools, students use electronic communication devices to bully other students, which calls for schoolteachers and school administrators to take necessary actions (Li, 2006). Although the issues of cyberbullying vary by country and region, it is nonetheless a worldwide concern. Similar to face-to-face bullying victimization, psychosocial and health consequences of cyberbullying victimization, such as mental health problems, particularly depression; declining academic performance; substance use; self-harm; and suicidality have been documented (Cénat et al., 2018; Maurya et al., 2022; Nixon, 2014; Tsitsika et al., 2015; Zaborskis et al., 2019). Despite the numerous consequences of cyberbullying, many adolescents do not disclose their experiences of bullying to adults, such as parents and teachers (DeLara, 2012).

This chapter aims to explore adolescent cyberbullying victimization within global contexts. The chapter begins with a background, which consists of definitions and prevalence of cyberbullying around the world, followed by how cyberbullying had been addressed around the world; solutions and recommendations for practice and policy; and future research directions.

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## **BACKGROUND**

### **Definition and Conceptualization of Cyberbullying**

Numerous definitions of cyberbullying have been proposed in the research literature, and there appear to be challenges as well as debates within the scientific community about how cyberbullying should be conceptualized (Menesini et al., 2012). The challenge of defining cyberbullying is attributed to a lack of clarity on how cyberbullying should be conceptualized (Tokunaga, 2010; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) as well as the rapid evolution of new technologies (Nocentini et al., 2010). Despite these challenges, researchers have realized the importance of including the definitions of cyberbullying in their surveys (Tokunaga, 2010). They, however, have debated whether the three criteria proposed by Olweus (1993) for defining face-to-face (or traditional) bullying, including intentionality, repetition, and imbalance of power, would apply to cyberbullying (Menesini et al., 2012).

Despite the debates regarding how cyberbullying should be defined among researchers, the definitions used in research share one common feature: Cyberbullying is a type of bullying, which occurs in the digital realm or medium of electronic text (Notar et al., 2013; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Moreover, research on cyberbullying highlights that there are a variety of terminologies for the phenomenon, depending on which acts are considered in the definition, including internet harassment, online harassment, and online bullying (Menesini et al., 2012). The five common criteria for the definition of cyberbullying, such as intentionality, repetition, imbalance of power, anonymity, and public vs. private, are included in the definition of cyberbullying used in research conducted in several countries (Menesini et al., 2012). In addition, according to Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008), definitions of cyberbullying also include behaviors that are not covered by face-to-face bullying. Such behaviors include having personal communications copied and sent to others, forwarding large amounts of icons and emoticons to others, changing the photos, and sending them for others to view.

### **Prevalence of Cyberbullying Across the World**

Due to the challenges of defining cyberbullying and variability in the range of measures and study methodologies across countries and age groups, it is difficult to compare the prevalence of cyberbullying around the world (Brochado et al., 2017). Below are the prevalence rates of cyberbullying perpetration and victimization for selected continents around the world.

#### **Europe**

A recent study comparing rates of cyberbullying across eight European countries and a sample of 4,847 students found the highest rates in Bulgaria and Hungary and the lowest prevalence in Spain (Sorrentino et al., 2019). The overall rate of cyberbullying perpetration across the eight European countries was about 17% for males and 11% for females while cyberbullying victimization was about 16.5% for males and 16.4% for females (Sorrentino et al., 2019). The prevalence rates in other cross-cultural studies examining European countries have varied. For example, Lobe et al. (2011) examined 25 European countries and found overall rates of about 6% for cyberbullying victimization and 3% for cyberbullying perpetration with the highest rates in Romania (14%) and Estonia (13%). Conversely, Tsitsika et al. (2015) (6 countries) and Athanasiou et al. (2018) (7 countries) found rates of 21.4% and 21.9% cyberbullying victimization,

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