

## Impact and Implications of Electronic Bullying

The emotional, physical, social, and academic consequences of electronic bullying have an enormous impact on human and social capital and are evident within education, health care, and social services.

### Key Research Findings

#### **Victimized Youth**

- Youth who report victimization through electronic bullying are more likely to report depressive symptomology than youth who are not involved in electronic bullying.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Children who are victims of electronic bullying report symptoms of major depression, while 4.6% of young people who are not victimized report depressive symptoms.<sup>4</sup>
- Male youth who report a DSM diagnosis of major depression are three times more likely to report being victimized through internet bullying than males who indicate mild or no symptoms. Female youth do not exhibit this association.<sup>5</sup>
- Adolescents who have been bullied electronically are eight times more likely to have reported carrying a weapon to school in the past month than other students.<sup>6</sup>
- Adolescents who have been bullied electronically are more likely to report detentions, suspensions, receiving a failing grade, and skipping school in the previous year.<sup>7,8</sup>

#### **Youth who Bully Electronically**

- 32% of youth who bully others electronically report frequent substance use, compared to 10% of youth not involved in electronic bullying.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Youth-reported delinquency is related to elevated odds of harassing others versus not harassing others online.<sup>11</sup>
- Electronic bullying perpetration is associated with involvement with traditional forms of bullying, delinquent peers, propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, and poor emotional bonds with caregivers.<sup>12,13</sup>
- Compared to youth who have never harassed others electronically in the past year: occasional perpetrators of electronic bullying are three times more likely to exhibit rule-breaking behaviors; frequent perpetrators of electronic bullying are seven times more likely to exhibit rule-breaking behaviors and nine times more likely to have aggressive behavior problems.<sup>14</sup>

### Key Themes

- Children and youth who are victimized by electronic bullying are at increased risk for experiencing psychological, academic, and acting out problems (e.g. weapon carrying).
- Children who bully others electronically are at increased risk for involvement in delinquency and other acting out problems.
- Children and youth who bully others are likely to engage in more traditional forms of bullying as well.

## **Implications**

### ***Education***

- Education to parents and school staff regarding the different types of experiences children and youth have online and understand the most frequently used sites and technologies.

### ***Assessment***

- Assessment of bullying should be inclusive and include the many forms of electronic bullying.

### ***Intervention***

- The continuity between the two contexts of bullying (i.e., traditional and electronic), suggests that supporting youth who are bullied and/or victimized in traditional ways, will likely also be addressing the problems of youth who bully and/or are victimized electronically.
- Unfortunately, many traditional Bullying Prevention programs do not address electronic bullying. But, by implementing these prevention programs it will reduce electronic bullying.
- Children and youth use the internet for both positive and negative activities, prevention needs to teach appropriate cyber behavior – net -etiquette and take a harm reduction approach because they are going to use the internet.
- It is challenging for schools to address because electronic bullying may not occur on school property but influences climate therefore warrants action and requires co-ordination with parents.
- Interventions need to be comprehensive, appropriate, and have timely responses (web support).
- Interventions need to involve the peer group since adults often do not know it is occurring.
- Intervention should also:
  - Be consistent with a progressive discipline approach
  - Relate to Progressive Discipline Policy
  - Allow students to report bullying safely and minimize the reprisal,
  - Define the responsibilities, roles, and responsibilities of the principal, teachers, parents, and students
  - Focus on education and cyber-proofing
- Cyber-proofing should be included in the curriculum.
- Adults can make a difference by: working together to create positive internet experiences, creating safe internet experiences, and monitoring and reporting to internet providers, or in extreme cases the police.

### ***Policy***

- Need to establish a policy statement that explicitly defines and addresses electronic bullying because of overlap and spill into peer relationships at school. The bullying may not occur on school property, but the impact for the student who is victimized is at the school climate level.

- The policy should recognize developmental changes, at risk groups when most prevalent, the power differential that augments with anonymous electronic bullying interactions, and the distress of youth who victimized.
- Agreements for Internet use can be developed as part of policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, K. J., Ybarra, M., & Finkelhor, D. (2007). The relative importance of online victimization in understanding depression, delinquency, and substance use. *Child Maltreatment*, 12, 314-324.

<sup>2</sup> Ybarra, M. L. (2004). Linkages between depressive symptomology and internet harassment among young regular internet users. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 7, 247-257.

<sup>3</sup> Ybarra, M. L. Mitchell, K. J. (2004). Youth engaging in online harassment: associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. *Journal of Adolescence*. 27, 319-36.

<sup>4</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>5</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>6</sup> Ybarra, M. L., Diener-West, M., & Leaf, P. J. (2007). Examining the overlap in internet harassment and school bullying: Implications for school intervention. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, S42-S50.

<sup>7</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>8</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>9</sup> Ybarra, M. L., Espelage, D. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2007). The co-occurrence of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation victimization and perpetration: Associations with psychosocial indicators. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, S31-S41.

<sup>10</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>11</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>12</sup> See note 1 above.

<sup>13</sup> See note 9 above.

<sup>14</sup> Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2007). Prevalence and frequency of internet harassment investigation: Implications for adolescent health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, 189-195.