PREVNet
Preventing Relationships and Eliminating Violence
La promotion des relations et l'élimination de la violence

Networks of Centres
of Excellence
Réseaux de centres
d'excellence

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

Electronic Bullying: Definition and Prevalence

What is Electronic Bullying?

- Electronic bullying, also referred to as cyberbullying, is willful and repeated harm inflicted through electronic media.
- It includes the use of electronic devices or the internet to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships.
- Various forms of electronic bullying include:
  - Text message bullying
  - Picture/video-clip bullying via mobile phone cameras
  - Phone call bullying via mobile phone
  - Email bullying
  - Chat room bullying
  - Bullying through instant messaging (IM)
  - Bullying via websites

Key Research Findings

- Despite its recent emergence, electronic bullying is very common among adolescents: Electronic bullying perpetration rates range from 4-18% and victimization rates are considerably higher at 7-35%.[1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10]
- Among youth who bully others electronically, 6% report frequent bullying, 6% report occasional bullying, and 17% report limited bullying within the previous year.[11]
- 55% of youth who are victimized report multiple electronic bullying incidents in the previous year.[12]
- Electronic bullying tends to be low in grade 5, peak in grade 8, and decline by grade 11.[13]
- Findings on gender differences are mixed. Many studies indicate no gender differences in electronic perpetration or victimization;[14,15,16] other studies indicate that male youth are more likely to bully and be victimized.[17,18]
- About 50% of adolescents know someone who has been victimized online.[19,20,21,22]
- A majority of teachers (84%) report that they have been electronically bullied.[23]

Key Themes

- Electronic bullying and victimization rates are high and warrant attention.
- Most youth who are victimized experience electronic bullying on multiple occasions.
- Electronic bullying peaks during middle school (grades 7 and 8).
- Gender associations with electronic bullying and victimization are not clear.
- Majority of youth know someone who is being victimized through electronic bullying.

Implications

Education and Training
  - Adults responsible for children and youth require knowledge about electronic bullying in its many forms.

- Involving youth in developing the training may be critical, as they are the experts and know about the extent and complexity of the electronic bullying problem.

Assessment
- Because electronic bullying is covert, adults may underestimate the number of youth involved in and affected by electronic bullying.
- A student survey focused on the various forms of electronic bullying will reveal trends that will help in prevention and intervention efforts, as well as in developing policies.

Prevention and Intervention
- Because electronic bullying affects substantial numbers of youth, prevention and intervention strategies are essential.
- Prevention strategies, such as education about electronic bullying and developing understanding regarding respectful use of electronic media should begin before it peaks in middle school.

Policy
- It is critical to establish clear policies regarding cyberbullying, not only at school but in all contexts where it might occur. These policies need to define cyberbullying and appropriate cyber-conduct.

[1] Agatston, P. W.,Kowalski, R. M., & Limber, S. P. (2007). Electronic bullying among middle school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41,* S22-S30.

[2] 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.

[3] Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2006). Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: A preliminary look at cyberbullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 4,* 148-169.

[4] Li, Q. (2007b). New bottle but old wine: A research of cyberbullying in schools. *Computers in Human Behavior, 23,* 1777-1791.

[5] Li, Q. (2006). Cyberbullying in schools: A research of gender differences. *School Psychology International, 27,* 157-170.

[6] Li, Q. (2007a). Bullying in the new playground: Research into cyberbullying and cyber victimization. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 23,* 435-454.

[7] 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,* 42-50.

[8] Ybarra, M. L., Espelage, D. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2007). The co-occurence of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation victimization and perpetration: Associations with psychosocial indicators. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41,* S31-S41.

[9] 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.

[10] Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2006). Examining characteristics and associated distress related to Internet harassment: findings from the Second Youth Internet Safety Survey. *Pediatrics, 118,* e1169-77.

[11] 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.

[12] Ybarra, M. L. (2004). Linkages between depressive symptomology and internet harassment among young regular internet users. *CyberPsychology and Behavior, 7,* 247-257.

[13] Williams, K. R., & Guerra, N. G. (2007). Prevalence and predictors of internet bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41,* 14-21.

[14] Beran, T., & Li, Q. (2005). Cyber-harassment: a new method for an old behavior. *Journal of Educational Computing Research, 32,* 265–277.

[15] See note 3 above.

[16] See note 1 above.

[17] Li, Q. (2006). Cyberbullying in schools: A research of gender differences. *School Psychology International, 27,* 157-170.

[18] Li, Q. (2007a). Bullying in the new playground: Research into cyberbullying and cyber victimization. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 23,* 435-454.

[19] See note 2 above.

[20] See note 3 above.

[21] See note 10 above.

[22] See note 3 above.

[23] Browne, L. (2007). 84 per cent of teachers have been cyberbullied. *Professionally Speaking, 3*, 15-17.