



**Scotland's Commissioner
for Children & Young People**

Looking at bullying and cyberbullying: mapping approaches and knowledge

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Contents

	Introduction	2
	Context	2
1	What is bullying?	3
1.1	Reasons for bullying	5
1.2	Prevalence	5
2	Cyberbullying	6
2.1	Media representations of cyberbullying	8
3	Approaches to bullying	9
3.1	International approaches	9
3.2	Approaches to cyberbullying	10
3.3	Cyberbullying policy in Scotland	11
3.4	Practice in Scotland	12
3.4.1	Support Me peer education project – Gallowhill Primary School, Paisley	12
3.4.2	Cyber Mentors – Peer support and education in Perth and Kinross	13
3.4.3	Peer education project on risk-taking behaviour online - Granton Youth Centre, Edinburgh	14
4	Children and young people’s views on cyberbullying and their perceptions and experiences of online bullying	14
	Conclusion	17
	Appendix 1 - Definitions of bullying and/or cyberbullying from a sample of websites	20
	Bibliography	22

Introduction

Bullying affects how *safe* and *respected* children and young people feel and therefore preventing it – and dealing with it appropriately when it does happen – is central to their wellbeing. As cyberbullying has emerged as a pervasive issue, practitioners, policy-makers and researchers have sought to define what online bullying is, and identify appropriate responses to it. The main aims of this research were:

- to explore the wider literature on bullying and cyberbullying to gain clear understandings of how the terms are defined and how they relate to each other
- to identify approaches to bullying and cyberbullying, with a focus on policy and practice in Scotland
- to ascertain, from the literature, children and young people's views on cyberbullying, and how they are experiencing online bullying.

In addition to a review of the literature to address the above aims, information was gathered through liaison with colleagues in different sectors and agencies, and from an evidence session of the Education and Culture Committee on cyberbullying¹.

Context

In 1999, the Scottish Anti-Bullying Network was established to provide support to school communities, with funding from the Scottish Executive. In 2007, *Respectme* became Scotland's national anti-bullying organisation. In 2010, the Scottish Government published *A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People*, which advocates viewing bullying in all of its forms (including cyberbullying) as one form of behaviour, requiring a consistent approach². In the same year, the Scottish Government's *Child Internet Safety Action Plan* outlined the planned measures to manage risk and ensure the online safety of children and young people³. The wellbeing of children and young people is at the heart of *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC), which promotes a multi-agency approach to ensuring that each child is safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools (SAGBIS) promote whole-school approaches to social and emotional wellbeing and positive school environments, based on mutual respect and trust and the recognition of children's rights⁴.

1 Education and Culture Committee evidence session on cyberbullying at the Scottish Parliament, 11 March 2014

2 Scottish Government (2010) *A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People*

3 Scottish Government (2010) *Scotland's Child Internet Safety Action Plan*

4 Scottish Government (2013) *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour*

1. What is bullying?

Olweus's formative research on bullying in Sweden in the 1970s was critical in establishing bullying as an important area of study. His definition of bullying has evolved over time, is used widely in the academic literature, and includes three key elements:

*(1) intentional negative behaviour that (2) typically occurs with some repetitiveness and is (3) directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself.*⁵

These three elements of intent to harm, repetition and power imbalance are central to how bullying is defined in the current research literature^{6,7,8}. The repeated behaviour can be physical or verbal, and occurs over time in a relationship characterised by an imbalance of power which makes it difficult for the person being bullied to defend herself or himself. A concise definition of bullying is a '*systematic abuse of power*'⁹. Olweus distinguishes between *direct* bullying (involving open attacks on an individual) and *indirect* bullying (involving social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group), arguing that the latter might be less visible but just as important to be attentive to¹⁰.

Looking at the definitions of bullying adopted by some organisations in the United Kingdom, it is clear that the elements of repetition, intent to harm and power imbalance are not consistently articulated as essential characteristics of bullying. Whereas the definitions used by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and Bullying UK *do* contain these three elements, a large number of organisations define bullying differently (see Appendix 1). For example, ChildLine's definition focuses on intent to harm, but not repetition or power imbalance.

Scotland's national anti-bullying organisation, *Respectme*, has published information for children and young people on its website about bullying which states:

*'Something only has to happen once to make you feel worried or scared to go to school or other places you enjoy going to.'*¹¹

Respectme's definition of bullying emphasises the *impact* on the person who is

5 Olweus, D. (2011) Bullying at school and later criminality: findings from three Swedish community samples of males. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*

6 Smith, P. (2013) School bullying. *Sociologia, Problemas e Practicas*

7 Sercombe, H. and Donnelly, B. (2012) Bullying and agency: definition, intervention and ethics. *Journal of Youth Studies*

8 Salmivalli, C., Karna, A. and Poskiparta, E. (2011) Counteracting bullying in Finland: the KiVa program and its effects on different forms of being bullied. *Journal of Behavioral Development*

9 Rigby, K (2002) *New Perspectives on Bullying*

10 Olweus, D. (1993) *Bullying at School: What we know and what we can do.*

11 *Respectme* website, www.respectme.org.uk

experiencing bullying. From this perspective, an individual need only experience bullying once to be seriously affected by it, and thus calling it bullying would be appropriate. Focusing on the impact on the person who experienced the bullying is essential, rather than proving intent to harm or waiting until the behaviour is repeated. This position is echoed by Olweus and Limber, whose guidance to schools is to act as quickly as possible when bullying takes place, rather than wait until the behaviour is repeated.¹²

Central to *Respectme's* definition of bullying is the notion of *agency*, which might be understood as an individual's ability to make choices and take action in their life. Within this framework, bullying is an attack on the agency of the person who experiences it, rendering the individual helpless, unable to act. Of central importance here is that as a person's agency is attacked, the relationship between the person(s) bullying and the person experiencing the bullying is the key focus; *abjection* rather than *subjection* is the main aim of the bullying⁷.

The disparity evident in definitions which appear in the academic literature and those used by different organisations suggests that children and young people, as well as adults who seek information to guide their understanding about bullying, might not recognise all three elements (*repetition, imbalance of power, intent to harm*) as essential aspects of bullying.

12 Olweus, D. and Limber, S. (2007) *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program Teacher Guide*

1.1 Reasons for bullying

The reasons for bullying in all of its forms which appear in the literature can be broadly categorised into five main areas: wider societal factors, as well as factors in the community, school, family and individual¹³.

Category	Factors
Society	tolerance of violence, bullying and the abuse of power in society, and portrayals of violence and bullying in the mass media
Community	neighbourhood levels of violence and safety, and socioeconomic conditions
School and classroom	the school climate and quality of teacher and pupil relationships
Family	family predictors such as insecure attachment, harsh physical discipline, and being a victim with over-protective parenting. Parental maltreatment and abuse is a likely risk factor in the bully/victim or aggressive victim group
Individual	temperament, hyperactivity, empathy, self-esteem, and popularity can be factors in predicting bullying roles; identity-based bullying is a risk factor for those in groups perceived as different from the majority

Bullying can be directed at groups, as well as individuals, on the basis of race, faith, or sexual orientation. Children and young people with additional support needs/special educational needs are significantly more likely to be bullied, especially those with autism spectrum disorder who may misinterpret social cues and situations¹⁴.

1.2 Prevalence

The number of children and young people who report or are observed to experience bullying ranges - in some cases quite widely - between studies. Given the variation in definitions of bullying, as discussed previously, it is clear that different interpretations of what bullying is will affect the prevalence rates. The most recent national survey undertaken in Scotland by Respectme found that 16% of children and young people aged 8-16 reported being bullied online¹⁵. In December 2013 it was reported that a Freedom of Information request made to local authorities by the Scottish Conservative Party found that 524 cases of cyberbullying had been recorded since 2010/11 (although as not all local authorities provided information it is likely that the real number is higher)¹⁶.

13 Thompson, F. and Smith, P. (2011) *The Use and Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Strategies in Schools*

14 Smith, P. (2012) Cyberbullying and cyber aggression. *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety: International research and practice*

15 Respectme (2011) *Cyberbullying Survey*

16 Scottish Conservative Party (2013) *Scourge of cyber bullying in Scotland's schools revealed*

International research suggests that whereas traditional bullying decreases as children get older, cyberbullying increases. The transition from primary to secondary school is characterised by an increase in bullying^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21}.

2. Cyberbullying

Researchers in the field of bullying and cyberbullying have explained that by extending the definition of bullying, cyberbullying can be seen as:

*an aggressive act or behaviour that is carried out using electronic means by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself*²².

This definition is used in much of the literature reviewed for this report. It is recognised that the three key elements of bullying might not be so neatly applied to our understandings of cyberbullying. For example, repetition is made difficult as a malicious comment or harmful image might only be posted once online, yet the potential for it to be seen and possibly circulated by a large number of people intensifies the impact on the person experiencing the bullying.

Secondly, power imbalance is arguably not as clear in cases of cyberbullying. Aspects such as greater technological expertise, having more 'friends' or greater popularity, greater strength or power in offline relationships and anonymity are discussed and made problematic in current research^{20, 23}.

Smith²⁴ identifies seven ways that cyberbullying differs from what he describes as traditional bullying²⁵:

- it depends on some degree of technological expertise
- it is primarily indirect rather than face-to-face, and thus may be anonymous

17 Rigby, K. (2002) *New Perspectives on Bullying*

18 Smith *et al.* (1999) What causes the age decline in reports of being bullied at school? Towards a developmental analysis of risks of being bullied. *Educational Research*

19 Pellegrini, A. and Long, J. (2002) A longitudinal study of bullying, dominance and victimization during the transition from primary school through secondary school. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*

20 Salmivalli, C. (2002) Is there an age decline in victimization by peers at school? *Educational Research*

21 Griffin, R. and Gross, A. (2004) Childhood bullying: current empirical findings and future directions for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*

22 Smith, P., Mahdavi, J., Carvalho, M., Fisher, S., Russell, S. and Tippett, N. (2008) Cyberbullying: its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

23 Vanderbosch, H. and van Kleemput, K. (2008) Defining Cyberbullying: a qualitative research into the perceptions of youngsters. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*.

24 Smith, P. (2012) Cyberbullying and cyber aggression. *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety: International research and practice*

25 In fact, the term 'traditional bullying' is used widely in the recent literature to denote bullying which does not take place online; it is sometimes also called 'face-to-face bullying'.

- the perpetrator does not usually see the victim's reaction, at least in the short term
- the variety of bystander roles in cyberbullying is more complex than in most traditional bullying (the bystander may be with the perpetrator when an act is sent or posted; with the victim when it is received; or with neither, when receiving the message or visiting the relevant internet site)
- one motive for traditional bullying is thought to be the status gained by showing (abusive) power over others, in front of witnesses, but the perpetrator will often lack this in cyberbullying
- the breadth of the potential audience is increased, as cyberbullying can reach particularly large audiences in a peer group compared with the small groups that are the usual audience in traditional bullying
- it is difficult to escape from cyberbullying (there is 'no safe haven'), as the victim may be sent messages to their mobile phone or computer, or access malicious comments on websites, wherever they are.

Although there is general agreement that 'bullying is bullying' in all of its forms, many researchers are attentive to whether and how cyberbullying might be experienced more intensely and negatively than other forms. Patchin and Hinduja, for example, argue that:

Anonymity, publicity, virality, and the constancy of electronic communications can make cyberbullying experiences particularly problematic for some targets²⁶.

It is proposed, in the literature, that harmful online behaviour which occurs only once might usefully be categorised as *cyber aggression*²⁷. Cyber bullying, then, describes behaviour which is repeated. *Cyber victimisation* is sometimes used to refer to sustained attacks by an individual or group. Viewing this as a 'spectrum' of online behaviours aligns with Respectme's view that impact is a key measure of bullying, so perhaps 'degrees of impact' is a helpful conceptualisation for all forms of bullying.

This leads to the issue of whether *trolling* and *sexting* are or might be forms of cyberbullying. Trolls post provocative content online which is intended to cause shock and upset. Although a 'don't feed the trolls' approach is often taken (in other words, ignore them and they will go away), in some cases individuals have been prosecuted for online offences. Sexting is a contested term, but usually is taken to mean the exchange of sexual messages and/or images through the internet and mobile phones. Sexting refers to a range of activities which may be linked to bullying, coercion, increased aggression and even violence²⁸.

26 Patchin, J. and Hinduja, S. (2013) Cyberbullying research. *Cyberbullying Through the New Media*, p. 266

27 Smith *et al.*, (2013) The nature of cyberbullying, an international network. *Cyberbullying Through the New Media*.

28 NSPCC (2012) *Children, Young People and 'Sexting': Summary of a qualitative study*

2.1 Media representations of cyberbullying

Between 2004 and 2011, researchers carried out a content analysis of media coverage on cyberbullying in daily newspapers in different countries and found the highest instances of news stories in the UK, Belgium and Australia and the least in Greece and Lithuania²⁹. This is noteworthy since both the UK and Lithuania fall into the 'higher use [of the internet], higher risk [of cyberbullying]' category, yet have the greatest discrepancy in media coverage of cyberbullying. The study also found that quality newspapers used a more reassuring and neutral tone than the popular press, and found 'only a few indications of moral panic framing'³⁰. Media coverage from a small range of sources (*The Independent*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Herald*, *The Scotsman* and the BBC – all online) was reviewed during the course of researching and writing this report, and no evidence of 'moral panic framing' was found in that time period. There was, however, evidence of cyberbullying being equated with abuse³¹. It should be noted that this research was carried out over a short period of time; it is clear from looking at previous media coverage of cyberbullying in the UK that the term is used in the media to cover a wide range of online behaviours, some of which might be more accurately described as online abuse or exploitation.

A CBBC Newsround special on cyberbullying was aired during this time, and will be discussed in the section on children and young people's perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying.

3. Approaches to bullying

3.1 International approaches

Most anti-bullying approaches and interventions have operated at school and classroom level, although some organisations and agencies have developed and implemented programmes which address bullying issues in school *and* in the wider lives of children and young people^{32,33}. Three main school-based approaches can be identified: *proactive*, *reactive* and *peer-support* (which can include both proactive and reactive strategies)³⁴.

Proactive strategies are often used as part of whole school bullying prevention approaches. They include whole school policies, supervision in the playground

29 Vandebosch, H., Simulioniene, R., Marczak, M., Vermeulen, A. and Bonetti, L. (2013) The role of the media. *Cyberbullying Through the New Media*

30 *ibid.*, p. 115

31 Wakefield, J. (2014) *Cyberbullies: How best to tackle online abuse?*

32 Olweus, D. (2011) Bullying at school and later criminality: findings from three Swedish community samples of males. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*

33 Smith, P., Salmivalli, C., and Cowie, H. (2012) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A response. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*

34 Olweus, D. and Limber, S. (2007) *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program Teacher Guide*

and in other areas of the school identified as at-risk for bullying (such as corridors), and curriculum work.

Reactive strategies address bullying issues after they have happened. Such approaches range from sanction-based, punitive measures to restorative practices, which aim to restore good relationships through non-punitive means.

Peer support involves children and young people in identifying issues, designing preventative approaches, and responding to bullying. Such strategies can include buddies, prosocial playground games, and one to one mentors (usually older pupils are paired with younger ones, which is seen as particularly effective at times of transition).

A large-scale systematic review of anti-bullying interventions and programmes³⁵ showed that the following elements were associated with a decrease in bullying:

- improved playground supervision
- disciplinary methods/punitive measures
- school conferences
- information for parents and parent training
- classroom rules and classroom management.

It also found that the following elements were associated with a decrease in being bullied:

- anti-bullying videos
- disciplinary methods
- work with peers (cooperative or group work)
- parent training.

The meta-analysis found that the duration and intensity of the programme for children and teachers was significantly associated with a decrease in being bullied.

3.2 Approaches to cyberbullying

Preventing cyberbullying by reducing known risks is seen as a key approach³⁶, and a common assumption is that taking action against bullying in the usual ways (such as through whole-school approaches) could also reduce the risk of cyberbullying. The role of adults in monitoring and managing children and young people's online use relevant to their developmental age and stage was

35 Ttofi, M. and Farrington, D. (2011) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: a systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*

36 McGuckin, C., Perren, S., Corcoran, L., Cowie, H., Dehue, F., Sevcikova, A., Tsatsou, P. and Vollink, T. (2013) How we can prevent cyberbullying and how victims can cope with it. *Cyberbullying Through the New Media*

identified as key in the Byron Review³⁷ (and in the model for practice³⁸), which also emphasised the importance of fostering digital media literacy skills in young people.

Some recent studies have shown that social competence or social emotional learning (SEL) programs (such as Roots of Empathy) designed to develop prosocial behaviours and prevent aggression and violence also prevent cyberbullying³⁹. Much of the literature reviewed for this report singles out the Finnish anti-bullying program KiVa, which has been found to have a positive effect in reducing cyberbullying. KiVa includes computer games that reinforce messages learned in anti-bullying lessons, in which children and young people develop skills to intervene and diffuse potential bullying incidents, and develop their confidence in using these skills in real-life situations. Schools implementing KiVa saw all forms of bullying (intimidation, psychological aggression, violence and cyberbullying) decrease significantly⁴⁰.

Emerging research and practice focuses on the ethical issues of online participation, and the importance of developing children and young people's understanding of their rights and responsibilities online. This might also be framed within the citizenship (and sometimes digital citizenship) curriculum^{41, 42, 43}.

Some consideration is given in the literature to technical solutions to cyberbullying such as blocking, deleting, and reporting⁴⁴.

Although some interesting initiatives at the prevention and support levels involving children and young people in designing training and mentoring programmes appear in the literature, they are few; in fact, much of the research recommends including children and young people in programmes of research, education and awareness, and support. Beatbullying's CyberMentors

37 Byron, T. (2008) *The Byron Report: Safer children in a digital world*

38 see Stone, K. (2013) *Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online: Balancing risk and opportunity*

39 Gradinger, P., Strohmeier, D. and Spiel, C. (2009) Traditional bullying and cyberbullying: identification of risk groups for adjustment problems. *Journal of Psychology*

40 Salmivalli, C., Karna, A. and Poskiparta, E. (2011) Counteracting bullying in Finland: the KiVa program and its effects on different forms of being bullied. *Journal of Behavioral Development*

41 Ttofi, M. and Farrington, D. (2011) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: a systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*

42 McGuckin, C., Perren, S., Corcoran, L., Cowie, H., Dehue, F., Sevcikova, A., Tsatsou, P. and Vollink, T. (2013) How we can prevent cyberbullying and how victims can cope with it. *Cyberbullying Through the New Media*

43 Good Play Project and Project New Media Literacies (2011) *Our Space: Being a responsible citizen of the digital world*

44 Salmivalli, C., Karna, A. and Poskiparta, E. (2011) Counteracting bullying in Finland: the KiVa program and its effects on different forms of being bullied. *Journal of Behavioral Development*

programme is mentioned as a promising initiative, which will be discussed in a subsequent section.

3.3 Cyberbullying policy in Scotland

The Scottish Government publication *A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People* states that online bullying 'can be very pervasive and difficult to handle'⁴⁵ but is essentially the same as bullying behaviour and requires similar approaches. The approaches to prevent and deal with bullying in the guidance broadly relate to:

- raising awareness of rights and responsibilities
- inclusive, supportive school cultures where bullying and discrimination are not accepted
- prosocial approaches in the classroom and wider school
- restorative practices.

Cyberbullying is mentioned once in the Scottish Government's *Child Internet Safety Action Plan*, namely that a 'key component of Respectme's work focuses on providing support on the issue of bullying in the online environment or "cyber bullying"⁴⁶. At the time of publication, the Scottish Government expressed its planned next steps as:

- working together to create a safer online environment by reducing children's access to inappropriate content
- developing awareness of and capacity in parents, carers and those who work with children and young people to stay safe and to respond effectively if problems occur
- emphasising that everyone, including children and young people, must take responsibility for their own online behaviour.

Publications which appear on the Education Scotland website on the topic of 'internet safety and responsible use' similarly date from 2010.

In November 2013 the Scottish Government published *Guidance on Developing Policies to Promote the Safe and Responsible Use of Mobile Technology in Schools*. The stated aim of the guidance is to enable schools and local authorities to develop policies promoting the use of mobile technology whilst also protecting staff, children and young people from possible harm caused by misuse⁴⁷. The guidance recognises the key role educators play in supporting

45 Scottish Government (2010) *A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People* p.4

46 Scottish Government (2010) *Scotland's Child Internet Safety Action Plan* p. 3

47 Scottish Government (2013a) *Guidance on Developing Policies to Promote the Safe and Responsible Use of Mobile Technology in Schools* p.1

children and young people to become *digital citizens* in their online activities in school and beyond. Such digital citizenship education should be embedded in the Health and Wellbeing curriculum, linked with schools' anti-bullying and rights-respecting cultures, and contain the three key principles of:

- digital etiquette (standards of conduct when using mobile devices)
- digital rights and responsibilities (what people can do if they feel uncomfortable with digital communication and how they can report misuse)
- digital security (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety).

The Scottish Government is also currently consulting with key stakeholders in the preparation of guidance on digital citizenship.

3.4 Practice in Scotland

Although there is undoubtedly widespread good practice across Scotland, very little has been written about practices aimed at preventing cyberbullying and supporting those who have experienced it. This section considers three initiatives: two are school-based and one involves a youth centre.

3.4.1 Support Me peer education project – Gallowhill Primary School, Paisley

In school session 2011-2012 Primary 7 pupils at Gallowhill Primary School set up a pupil-led school social enterprise initiative called Support Me, to raise awareness about and support children and young people who experience cyberbullying. Pupils design and deliver workshops to Primary 4-7 classes in the school with the aim of expanding to other local primary schools. Their work is grounded in the needs and interests of pupils in the school; for example, they did a survey to find out who had experience of cyberbullying, the websites they used and those on which they had experienced bullying. At lunch and break times, and once a week after school, pupils are involved in a range of activities including preparing for conferences they have been asked to present at, and researching and writing articles for their website (<http://www.cybersupport.me>) which aims to educate and inform children, parents and carers and educators, and to support anyone with experience of being cyberbullied. Pupils have developed an anti-cyberbullying resource pack, consisting of practical materials for use in the classroom⁴⁸. They are also creating anti-cyberbullying comic strips to be published as a book and made available on their website. Support Me aims to help keep children and young people safe online as well as raise awareness about cyberbullying.

48 Support Me (2013) *Anti Cyberbullying Resource Pack*

3.4.2 *Cyber Mentors – Peer support and education in Perth and Kinross*

In 2011, a group of pupils at Perth High School became the first Cyber Mentors in Scotland, following training led by Beatbullying. The programme is aimed at 11 to 18 year olds and involves real-time online mentoring and support via a positive, safe social networking environment. One of the main aims is to enable young people – who might be reluctant to talk to adults - to discuss (anonymously) issues related to bullying with peers before the problem escalates or causes considerable distress to the young person experiencing bullying. Peer or cyber mentors provide support and offer suggestions and strategies for dealing with the difficulties faced. The cyber mentors are themselves supported by senior mentors and trained counsellors. Perth and Kinross Council is currently the only local authority in Scotland to adopt the Cyber Mentors scheme.

Perth and Kinross Council is also implementing the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) project, another peer education strategy which involves issues such as cyberbullying, sexting and gender based violence. Older pupils work with younger ones to discuss possible situations and responses or reactions.

3.4.3 *Peer education project on risk-taking behaviour online - Granton Youth Centre, Edinburgh*

A peer education programme designed to explore issues of young people's risk-taking behaviour – specifically sharing explicit images of themselves or their peers – was developed in 2013 at Granton Youth Centre. Twelve young people aged 14-18 were involved in an eight week groupwork programme with the aims of discussing key issues around their online use, safety and risks, and developing a peer education programme for Primary 7 pupils on their pre-S1 visit (at Broughton High School). During the pilot phase, the young people presented the training to groups in their own and other informal youth work settings. The young people have also produced an information and awareness resource, to be made available to schools and other youth groups, as well as through digital channels.

4 Children and young people's views on cyberbullying and their perceptions and experiences of online bullying

Few research studies have explored what children and young people think about cyberbullying, and how they perceive the experience of online bullying. A very small number of participatory studies have been carried out, in addition to some studies with small sample group numbers. The large-scale EU Kids Online study has sought the views of children and young people about the prevalence of cyberbullying and the online sites where bullying was experienced.

In a participatory study of almost 1500 13 to 18 year olds in England, young

people identified cyberbullying as being a serious health concern for them⁴⁹. Of the young people surveyed, 38% had experience of cyberbullying, either directly or as witnesses. Young people identified abusive emails and texts and prank and silent phone calls as the most common forms of bullying experienced. Older young people experienced more cyberbullying in more ways and in a more aggressive manner (such as hate websites). More than half (52%) of young people were bullied with two or more forms of technology.

Young people identified a whole-school, multi-tiered approach as key to preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Experiencing cyberbullying at home was much more common than at school, although older young people were more likely to feel that cyberbullying could be experienced anywhere. Young people viewed schools as important sites of change, in terms of developing self protection skills and opportunities to take part in anti-bullying initiatives; in contrast, they believed that their parents required to have better digital skills and to take a more active role in supporting their internet use.

Nearly one third (28%) of young people reported that they had not spoken to anyone about their experience of cyberbullying. Of those who did, younger youth (aged 12 - 13 years) talked to parents and other family members, whereas older young people (aged 14 - 15 years) spoke to friends and agencies such as police, helplines and internet providers. Significant numbers of young people (81% of older young people and 74% of younger youth) reported concerns that cyberbullying would increase due to the evolving nature of technology.

A second participatory study⁵⁰ involved secondary school pupils in the UK designing and administering a questionnaire on cyberbullying to Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils (aged 11 - 14 years) in their school. Young people identified three main reasons for cyberbullying:

- anonymity
- cowardliness
- avoidance of the victim's response.

The study found that young people felt that a joke becomes cyberbullying when two key elements exist:

- time/amount of messages
- hurtful/threatening messages.

Half of the respondents felt that *anyone* was at risk of being cyberbullied, regardless of age, gender or religious beliefs.

49 Tarapdar, S. and Kellett, M. (2011) *Young People's Voices on Cyberbullying: What can age comparisons tell us*

50 Ackers, M. (2012) Cyberbullying: through the eyes of children and young people. *Educational Psychology in Practice: theory, research and practice in educational psychology*

The study also identified an emerging form of cyberbullying not found in previous studies: online gaming, an area which young people felt has become a 'commonly used method to intimidate, threaten and denigrate their users'⁵¹.

EU Kids Online, a large-scale study of the online practices and experiences of young people in different European countries, reported on what bothers children and young people online. Witnessing bullying online (defined in the study as *repeated aggression*) was identified as a concern by 4.7% of the total respondents (15444) – higher than sexting or pornography. Individual responses showed that social networking sites were identified as the most likely places to see hurtful comments and aggression, followed by YouTube. Only 6% of respondents reported receiving nasty or hurtful comments online, the lowest reported risk⁵².

A small study⁵³ of how primary school children perceive and describe cyberbullying found that children identified *repetition* and *intention to harm* as crucial factors distinguishing cyberbullying from pranks. They believed that bullies are driven by:

- intrinsic factors (for example, a desire to bully others)
- negative experiences with the victim (such as losing a game against them)
- traits of the victim (like wearing the wrong clothes).

The children also expressed the view that these reasons might overlap. Many of the children who had experience of being bullied online had not discussed it with anyone, explaining that feelings of shame were the main reason. Being forbidden or discouraged by their parents for using the internet were named as other reasons for not speaking about the bullying, as was the fear of further bullying if they spoke out. A significant number of children feared losing their access to the internet if they reported bullying.

In CBBC's *Cyberbullying: A newsround special*⁵⁴ a small number of young people discussed their experience of cyberbullying. The programme began with a montage of young people's voices, explaining how being cyberbullied made them feel:

'It felt like I was in a cage'

'isolated' (the young person later explained that being cyberbullied at home meant there was no one to help resolve it, whereas if it happened at school he could tell the teacher)

51 *ibid.*, p. 154

52 EU Kids Online, (2013) *In Their Own Words: What bothers children online?*

53 Baas *et al.*(2013) Children's perspectives on cyberbullying: insights based on participatory research. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*

54 CBBC (2014) *Cyberbullying: A Newsround Special*

'Mum and Dad hadn't experienced anything like it so it was hard for them to know how to help'

'Bullying feels like you are trapped in a room with no windows and no doors. The walls are closing in and there is no escape.'

Four young people were interviewed about their experiences of being cyberbullied, and their views about causes of bullying online as well as suggestions for young people who are bullied are summarised below.

One young person said that the internet makes it 'way too easy' to bully others. She felt that people can hide behind the internet: *'They wouldn't say the same things to your face'*. She advised anyone who experiences cyberbullying to tell someone they trust, to block the bully or delete their comments, and not to retaliate or respond because that is what the bully wants.

Another young person spoke of her experiences receiving nasty, anonymous comments on a social networking site. She described feeling anxious at school after seeing the comments, wondering who was posting them. She suggested that if others had similar experiences that they shut down their social networking account (as she did), saying: *'It's so easy to get bullied these days because technology has moved on. Don't suffer in silence.'*

A third young person, a popular blogger with three million subscribers to her YouTube videos, described feeling concerned about reading upsetting comments posted about her. She explained that in her view cyberbullying is *'very easy, you can type comments so you don't need to think about it, press send and walk away'*. She believed that people post comments online which they would not make to someone's face.

The fourth young person described how he began to experience cyberbullying after starting secondary school, in the form of nasty comments posted about him on two social networking sites. He said: *'Everybody has a smart phone and it's always there. You can't get away from it.'* He is now an Anti-Bullying Ambassador.

Listening to the views of children and young people who have experienced online bullying is essential to understanding its impact on them, as well as what they feel could be done to prevent and manage instances of cyberbullying. Although there is limited evidence of research in this area with and by children and young people, the studies that have been done are insightful.

Conclusion

Since the publication of Olweus's study of *mobbning* in Sweden in the 1970s, bullying has become a large field of study in several countries. In the last decade, cyberbullying has been an emerging and evolving area of research, although there is at this stage a fairly limited evidence base in this area. Additionally, there are conflicting findings about issues such as whether cyberbullying should be seen as essentially the same as other forms of bullying or if in fact it requires more nuanced conceptualisations and approaches⁵⁵.

More research is needed by and with children and young people, to involve them as fully as possible in identifying emerging risks as well as solutions to prevent and cope with cyberbullying. At the time of writing, the Scottish Government has announced plans to undertake research to look at children and young people's experiences of online bullying in Scotland, in partnership with *Respectme*. There is also current activity seeking young people's views on prejudice-based harassment and bullying in schools, commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission⁵⁶.

No evidence was found in the academic literature of approaches to cyberbullying in Scotland, either in schools or led by other agencies or voluntary organisations. It is anticipated that there is good practice in this area, which has not been formally documented. Doing so would not only add a Scottish perspective to the international literature, it would help inform and improve policy and practice. It would be useful, for instance, to know how issues around cyberbullying are being addressed in the Health and Wellbeing curriculum in primary and secondary schools, possibly within wider citizenship and rights-respecting frameworks. Additionally, it would be helpful to have a clearer picture of multi-agency approaches to preventing and dealing with online bullying in Scotland, to identify how partnership working has been developed to promote positive online participation.

As more evidence about successful approaches to prevent and deal with online bullying emerges, it will enable a more informed response to the problem. What seems clear in the literature is that there is some debate about whether cyberbullying requires responses distinct from those used with other forms of bullying: whereas some argue that cyberbullying should not be seen simply as 'an old problem in a new disguise'⁵⁷ others caution against inflating risks associated with cyberbullying above other forms of bullying. Approaches are being developed that specifically focus on preventing online bullying, such as

55 Bauman, S., Cross, D. and Walker, J. (2012) *Principles of Cyberbullying Research: Definitions, measures and methodology*

56 Can be accessed at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BullyingAndPrejudicePupils?v=3>

57 Cheung, A. (2012) Tackling Cyber-Bullying from a Children's Rights Perspective. *Law and Childhood Studies: Current Legal Issues 2011, Volume 14*, p. 300.

the computer algorithm used to detect and flag possible harmful language to online users (called 'empathetic computing' by the programmer who developed the code⁵⁸). KiVa, an anti-bullying program which has been found to significantly reduce aggression and bullying in all of its forms, is noted for reducing cyberbullying.

There is growing awareness of and interest in the role that new media plays in the sexualisation of young people, and in particular there are increasing concerns about how young people's sexual attitudes and behaviours are shaped by increased access to online pornography. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the issue of how children and young people are socialised in terms of their online communication with each other. Contrasting perspectives range from 'what adults see as cyberbullying is part of normal or common youthful behavior'⁵⁹ to the view that words posted online have such permanence - and lasting impact - 'that will haunt the victims for the rest of their lives'⁶⁰. The (albeit limited) evidence of children and young people's views of cyberbullying is that posting nasty comments about others is 'too easy' to do online when they are not face-to-face with the person being bullied. More evidence is needed from a range of perspectives about the normalisation of anti-social online behaviour which is or might lead to cyberbullying, and which might inform preventative approaches to online bullying.

58 Wakefield, J. (2014) *Cyberbullies: How best to tackle online abuse?* reports on a computer algorithm developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to detect and flag potentially harmful word clusters in language used in social networking sites. At the time of writing it was being used on MTV's *A Thin Line*.

59 Cesaroni, C., Downing, S. and Shahid, A. (2012) Bullying enters the 21st century? Turning a critical eye to cyber-bullying research, *Youth Justice*, p. 207

60 Cheung, A. (2012) Tackling Cyber-Bullying from a Children's Rights Perspective. *Law and Childhood Studies: Current Legal Issues 2011, Volume 14*, p. 300.

Appendix 1 – Definitions of bullying and/or cyberbullying from a sample of websites

Organisation	Definition of bullying and/or cyberbullying
Respectme	<p>Bullying is a mixture of behaviours and impacts which can impact on a person's capacity to feel in control of themselves. This is what we term as their sense of 'agency'. Bullying takes place in the context of relationships; it is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out.</p> <p>Online bullying, or Cyberbullying, is often the same type of behaviour as other bullying, for example name-calling, spreading rumours and leaving people out, but it takes place online, on social networking sites, in chatrooms, and via mobile technologies, gaming and instant messaging platforms. The impact of this is as hurtful and damaging as other forms of bullying behaviour. Advances in technology are simply providing an alternative means of reaching people – where malicious messages were once written on school books or toilet walls, they can now be sent via mobile phone or the internet, making their reach greater, more immediate and much harder to remove or erase.</p>
ChildLine	<p>Bullying can happen to anyone at any age. Being bullied at school, home or online might involve someone pushing you, teasing you, talking about you or calling you names. Cyber bullying (online bullying) is when a person or a group of people uses the internet, email, online games or any other kind of digital technology to threaten, tease, upset or humiliate someone else.</p>
ThinkUKnow	<p>Cyber bullying is when someone uses the internet or mobiles to deliberately upset someone else. This is a form of bullying and you shouldn't have to put up with it.</p>
Anti-Bullying Alliance	<p>Bullying is <i>the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power</i>. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It includes behaviour such as name calling, spreading hurtful rumours, excluding someone from groups, taking possessions [sic] or money, hitting, pushing or kicking and unwanted sexual touch. Cyberbullying has the same effect as face-to-face bullying but takes place over the internet or through phones. Bullying is often driven by prejudice and can be targeted at someone's gender, culture, religion or perceived sexuality. Children and young people may also find themselves a target because of a disability, disfigurement or illness.</p>

Bullying UK	<p>There is no legal definition of bullying. But it is usually defined as repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt someone either emotionally or physically, and is often aimed at certain people because of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation or any other aspect such as appearance or disability.</p> <p>Cyber bullying is bullying through a mobile phone or online (eg by email, instant messenger or on social network sites). Cyber bullying is just as serious.</p>
Ditch the Label	<p>Cyberbullying can include anything offensive, humiliating, threatening or abusive that is directed at you on an electronic form of communication. This includes via text, email, Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites, instant messaging services and online video games.</p> <p>[No definition of bullying found on the website or in the 2013 report.]</p>
Cybersmile	<p>Uses the Oxford English dictionary definition: <i>"Cyberbullying (noun): The use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature: children may be reluctant to admit to being the victims of cyberbullying"</i></p> <p>It can be perpetrated by individuals or a group of people and often (but not exclusively) involves teenage and pre-teen age groups.</p>
BBC	<p>Webwise has no definition but does have information about cyber bullying (including harassment, stalking, creeping and trolling) as well as what to do about it.</p>
Digizen	<p>Has posted Childnet's cyberbullying leaflet (published 2007):</p> <p>Cyberbullying is the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else.</p> <p>Cyberbullying is a form of bullying, and therefore all schools should already be equipped to deal with the majority of cases through their existing anti-bullying policies and procedures.</p>
Instagram	<p>No definition posted, but in the Community Guidelines one of the rules is:</p> <p>Don't be rude. Instagram is a friendly place where everyone should feel safe and comfortable sharing their lives through photos and videos. It is not an appropriate place to abuse, attack, harass, or impersonate others. If we receive valid complaints about your conduct, we'll send a warning or disable your account. Alternatively, we'd recommend users block all meanies & trolls to prevent further issues.</p>
Beatbullying – Cybermentors	No definition found
Facebook	No definition found

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