The Effects of Cyberbullying on Mental Health in Schools

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Abstract

The effects of cyberbullying on social media sites extend into schools and affect the overall learning environment for students. “Cyberbullying is a relatively new method of bullying using modern communication technologies, primarily mobile phones and the Internet, to hurt others using such features as text messaging, voicemail, picture imaging, video clips, email, instant messenger, chat-rooms and websites, including social networking sites” (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012, p. 127). According to Pelfrey and Weber (2014), cyberbullying opportunities proliferate as teenagers engage with their peers after school hours through the use of social technologies such as texting and Facebook. Furthermore, these out-of-school interactions often lead to in-school altercations, thereby diminishing the quality of learning and affecting students, teachers and school personnel (Pelfrey & Weber, 2014, p. 227). Much research has been performed in relation to the number of incidents related to cyberbullying in schools, however, there is not an adequate amount of research focusing on the effects cyberbullying has on mental health and behaviors of the students in the school setting.

This report will incorporate data from previous research on cyberbullying in schools and will compare that data with mental health and behavioral problems with students involved in cyberbullying. Thus far, research has determined that cyberbullying is increasing in incidents dramatically as social media is gaining popularity. However, very little is known about how cyberbullying is affecting the overall climate of schools and the learning environment.
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The Effects of Cyberbullying on Mental Health in Schools

According to Kyriacou and Zuin (2016), cyberbullying can be defined as the electronic transmission of distressing messages to another individual repeatedly (p. 34). In addition, cyberbullying is when someone repeatedly harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online or when using cell phones or other electronic device (Chadha, Fernandes, & Sanyal, 2015, p. 648). In recent years, the effects of cyberbullying in schools have been increasingly studied and reported through scholarly articles. It is important to note that cyberbullying is not limited to the bully and the victim but will include other individuals as well. According to Olweus and Limber (2010), “most bullying incidents directly or indirectly involve children and youth other than the victimized child and his or her perpetrators. Consequently, the behavior and attitudes of relevant peers, as manifested in group mechanisms and processes, are also important to consider” (p. 126). In addition, cyberbullying by pupils has grown substantially over the last ten years (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016, p. 34). This research project will be supported by previous research on cyberbullying in schools and will delve deeper into the mental health and behaviors of students affected by cyberbullying.

**Psychological Effects of Cyberbullying**

**Effects on Victims**

**Cyberbullying and social interaction.** As stated by Chadha, Fernandes, and Sanyal (2015), “Cyberbullying can be a devastating experience for the children who are aimed at. In reality, the suffering, hurt and agony victims undergo influences nearly every outlook of their existence leaving them feeling alone, isolated, endangered, depressed and anxious” (p. 649). The effects of cyberbullying on victims can appear differently from one victim to the next.
Furthermore, even after the bullying ends, the victims struggle for a long time to recuperate (Chadha et al., 2015, p. 649).

A study performed by Chadha et al., (2015), used 480 adolescents between the ages of 16-19 to determine whether there is any effect of cyberbullying on self-esteem and social interaction anxiety of the adolescents. The adolescents in the study were screened for victimization of cyberbullying and were then narrowed down to 60 students of whom were cyberbullied. In the study, the participants completed the Cyberbullying and Aggression Survey Instrument, the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. According to Chadha et al. (2015), “the results of this study indicated that there is a significant effect of cyberbullying on the self-esteem of the adolescents. In other words, the non-cyberbullied adolescents had significantly higher self-esteem than the cyberbullied adolescents” (p. 653). Additionally, cyberbullying affects classroom performance.

**Cyberbullying and academic performance.** The effects of cyberbullying also extend into the classroom. Academically, cyberbullying can have negative effects on the victims due to the social nature of school. M. Kaur and I. Kaur (2016), surveyed 145 students with ages ranging from 12-17 with cyber victimization backgrounds. These students completed the Cyberbullying and Victimization Questionnaire, Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, Academic Achievement Motivation Test, and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to address the relationships between cyberbullying victimization and suicidal ideation, psychological distress, academic achievement, and self-esteem. The findings from the study by M. Kaur and I. Kaur (2016), indicated that cyberbullying victimization causes deep emotional and psychological damage to adolescents. Additionally, self-esteem and negative academic achievement are negatively correlated. The higher self-esteem an adolescent
portrays, the lower the likelihood of poor academic achievement and vice versa. Furthermore, academic achievement and self-esteem are negatively correlated with cyberbullying victimization. This information tells us that the higher academic achievement and self-esteem a student possesses, the lower the likelihood of that student being a victim of cyberbullying. Higher levels of cyber victimization deteriorate the self-esteem and academic achievement of students. Researchers reveal that cyber victimization leaves adolescents feeling socially incompetent and unaccepted by their peers. Additionally, adolescents who have lower self-worth are more predisposed to the cyber bullying victimization. Researches revealed that cyber victims internalize their feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, and they tend to bullying/victimization behavior making performance suffer (Kaur & Kaur, 2016, p. 1069). Furthermore, cyberbullying can lead to even more serious consequences.

**Cyberbullying and suicide.** Furthermore, the effects of cyberbullying can lead to more serious health concerns such as suicide. In a study by Sampasa-Kanyinga, Roumeliotis, and Xu (2014), 2,999 students from Ontario, Canada completed a school-based survey to examine the associations between cyberbullying and school bullying victimization with suicidal ideation, plans and attempts among middle and high school students. The results of the survey indicated that victims of cyberbullying and school bullying incurred a significantly higher risk of suicidal ideation, plans and attempts compared to those who had not encountered such threats (p. 1). The findings from this survey indicate that cyberbullying is a contributor to suicidal ideation, as well as, plans and attempts to commit suicide.

**Effects on Perpetrators**

Several studies have suggested that increased bullying of others is driven by the self-reported goals of acquiring and maintaining a high status, and of being dominant and popular,
especially among preadolescent and adolescent males (Ciucci & Baroncelli, 2014, p. 584). Perpetrators of cyberbullying act in a calculated and strategic manner. Therefore, these types of negative interactions with another person do not happen haphazardly. Additionally, it has been found that proactively aggressive individuals, such as bullies, are more likely characterized by a lack of affective empathy and guilt (Ciucci & Baroncelli, 2014, p. 584). In line with previous research on bullying behaviors, recent research has begun to examine the association between cyberbullying and personality traits.

In the study by Ciucci and Baroncelli (2014), peer social standing and emotion-related personality traits were measured by cross-examining the emotion of empathy for others and perceived popularity among adolescent boys and girls. This study found that, in girls, peer social standing did not have relevance for female cyberbullying. However, an uncaring attitude towards others carried a positive correlation to cyberbullying incidents. Additionally, in boys, uncaring attitudes towards others and perceived popularity did correlate with cyberbullying. Uncaring was positively related to the presence of cyberbullying behaviors in boys with low levels of perceived popularity (Ciucci & Baroncelli, 2014, p. 587). The effects of cyberbullying can also affect school staff.

**Effects on School Staff**

Little is known about the thoughts and feelings of teachers regarding the problem of cyberbullying, because there have been a limited number of studies done on the perception of teachers on this topic. According to Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, and Ferrin (2012), “there is an evident lack of research examining teachers’ views on cyberbullying” (p. 355). Additionally, “schools may be held legally accountable for failing to respond appropriately to cyberbullying.” With this in mind, it is important that teachers, school administrators, and other staff members be
prepared to appropriately address cases of cyberbullying when brought to their attention” (p. 355). School administrators and teachers must have a clear understanding of the clear and imminent danger associated with cyberbullying, because it can happen anywhere and at any time. In the study by Stauffer et al. (2012), a sample of 66 teachers participated in an online survey regarding their perceptions on cyberbullying. The first question on the survey asked about the teachers’ perception of the impact of cyberbullying on students. According to Stauffer et al. (2012), participants indicated that cyberbullying does not “toughen kids up,” has long-lasting negative effects on students, and does not “prepare students for life.” Although the majority of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions reflect what we would hope to see among teachers, up to one fourth of teachers did not endorse socially desirable responses (p. 359).

Likewise, when asked if a formal bully prevention program should be implemented in the school, the teachers’ responded with only 9% were not supportive, indicating Definitely not or Probably not. Almost half of all teachers (49%) were unsure about implementing a formal bullying program, indicating a program should Maybe be implemented. The remaining teachers (42%) indicated that a prevention program should Probably or Definitely be implemented (p. 360). The second research question investigated the likelihood the teachers would intervene when cyberbullying occurs. The teachers responded that they were somewhere between Undecided and Likely to use all of the suggested strategies, with the exception of Do nothing. When aware of cyberbullying occurring at school, teachers reported that they were very unlikely to Do nothing (p. 360). Additionally, teachers reported that when aware of cyberbullying occurring at school, they were more likely to report the incident to school administrators. Furthermore, teachers were somewhat likely to talk to the cyberbully and the victim. Teachers also indicated they were somewhat likely to take away the cyberbully’s privileges (p. 360). Stauffer et al.
(2012) reported when the cyberbullying occurred away from school, average responses indicated that teachers were more undecided about their likelihood of using the listed strategies. Teachers reported being somewhat unlikely to *Do nothing* indicating they were more likely to ignore the cyberbullying if it occurred away from school. In similar contrast, where as participants were somewhat likely to take away the privileges of the cyberbullies if the bullying occurred at school, they reported being *Somewhat unlikely* to take away privileges if the incident occurred away from school. In essence, it appears that teachers see themselves as having little or no responsibility to intervene if the cyberbullying occurs away from school (p. 361).

In a report by Olweus and Limber (2010), the actions of adults within a school setting are instrumental in the manifestation of cyberbullying in schools. Olweus and Limber (2010) stated, “environmental factors such as the attitudes, routines, and behavior of adults in the school environment play a major role in determining the extent to which the problems will manifest themselves in a classroom or a school” (p. 125). The actions that adults take to hinder and prevent cyberbullying play a crucial role in the development of cyberbullying, and therefore, can play an immense role in anti-bullying behaviors.

**Coping Strategies to Cyberbullying**

In regard to the effects of cyberbullying in terms of coping strategies, victims will exhibit distress in a multitude of ways. According to Paul, Smith, and Blumberg (2012), “individual coping styles can greatly alter the level of distress experienced by bullying and the recurrence of similar events. This has led to the implied notion of ‘maladaptive’ or ‘non-productive’ coping methods; both of the terms ‘internalizing’ (cognitive processes) and ‘externalizing’ (behavioral response) are also considered as avoidance strategies and emotional reactions to stress (p. 129). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that bullies, victims and those identified as bully/
victims rely on different coping mechanisms when dealing with psychologically distressing situations. In one study, bullies and victims typically present an emotional reaction to stress, with the bully using external coping mechanisms, the victim using internal coping mechanisms and the bully/victim showing low levels of coping skills (p. 129). Additional effects of cyberbullying can occur for victims of cyberbullying.

**Effects of Cyberbullying on Academic Success**

Muzamil and Shah (2016), examined the influence of traditional and cyber bullying on students’ academic performance in the recently completed school year. “Our study showed that traditional as well as cyber bullying may have a significantly negative impact on students’ academic performance, but socioeconomic status of parents is a strong neutralizing impact. These findings have important social and public health implications in that students that are bullied may not only perform poorly in school, being bullied may have a spill-over effects on their social life as well” (p. 88). Additionally, cyber bullying is a rapidly emerging form of immoral, antisocial behavior that may present new and grim consequences, resulting in challenges for parents, teachers, and others committed to the education and the well-being of children (Muzamil & Shah, 2016, p. 88). Minimizing the effects of cyberbullying has proven to be an immense challenge for schools.

**Roles in Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying involves more than just the perpetrator and victim. There are multiple roles within the act of cyberbullying that are important to acknowledge.

Notar, Padgett, & Roden (2013) stated:

There are six different roles identified throughout the literature. Entitlement bullies are individuals who believe they are superior and have the right to harass or demean others,
especially if the person is different. Targets of entitlement bullies are individuals who are picked on because bullies believe that they are different or inferior. Retaliators are individuals who have been bullied by others and are using the Internet to retaliate. Victims of retaliators are individuals who have been bullying others but are now receiving the cruelty of being cyberbullied. Furthermore, bystanders who are part of the problem are individuals who encourage and support the bully or who watch the bullying from the sidelines but do nothing to help the victim. Finally, bystanders who are part of the solution are individuals who seek to stop the bullying, protest it, and provide support to the victim. (p. 4)

**Understanding Why Cyberbullying Occurs**

Cyberbullying can occur for multiple reasons by anyone that has access to technology, most notably, the internet. Notar, Padgett, and Roden, (2013), explained “cyberbullying occurs because historically less powerful groups may be more powerful (or at least not disadvantaged) when on-line. Minority groups (irrespective of race or ethnicity), although potentially unpopular on the schoolyard, may not be exposed as marginal on the Internet” (p. 4). Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, and Padilla (2010), stated that cyberbullying was significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to violence, and less perceived social support of friends (p. 84). Additional possible reasons for cyberbullying are: envy, prejudice and intolerance for disability, religion, gender, shame, pride, guilt, and anger (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013, p. 3).

According to Beyazit, Şimşek, and Ayhan (2017), “being bullied on the Internet, parental control, and owning a computer made significant contributions, in which our results showed that exposure to cyberbullying was among the most important predictors of cyberbullying others” (p.
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1517). Additionally, Beyazit et al. (2017) found that 71% of those who commit cyberbullying have themselves previously been victims of cyberbullying. Other scholars have also suggested that there is a positive correlation between being a cyberbully and being a cyber victim. Beyazit et al. (2017) suggested that cyberbullying occurs particularly around the age of 14 years because this is the stage at which adolescents spend more time on their cell phones and are more likely to participate in social network sites, which are considered prime places for cyberbullying to occur. Girls have been found to be more likely to be cyberbullied, especially through text messages and phone call (Beyazit et al., 2017, p. 1517). Additionally, Beyazit et al. (2017) found that the likelihood of being involved in cyberbullying as an adolescent increases with age, and pointed out that this risk particularly increases when the adolescent has a profile on a social networking site (p. 1517). Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011) found that adolescents’ using the Internet privately, that is, away from their parents’ watchful eyes, is associated with a greater likelihood of those adolescents being involved in cyberbullying. Additionally, a higher socioeconomic status was associated with a greater prevalence of cyberbullying and this was in line with our result on family income (Beyazit, Şimşek, & Ayhan, 2017, p. 1517). According to Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker, and Perren (2012), “this could be because people with a higher socioeconomic status have more disposable income to spend on the latest electronic devices than do those with a lower socioeconomic status” (p. 62). Owning a computer, rather than just having access to one in a public library or an Internet café, increases the time spent using computers and accessing the Internet. Several scholars have argued that cyberbullying is more prevalent among those young people who use information and communication technologies more frequently than others do (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012). Likewise, the role of bystanders are key in combatting cyberbullying.
Cyberbullying and the Bystander Effect

Bullying perpetration often occurs when bystanders are present (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012, p. 47). As bullying occurs, bystanders typically do nothing to assist the victim. According to O’Connell, Pepler, and Craig (1999), “some research has indicated that more than 80% of the time an observer witnesses victimization” (p. 437). Although successful bullying programs remain important accomplishments, research found that few programs specifically target the behavior of bystanders (i.e., an individual who witnesses bullying) (O’Connell et al., 1999, p. 48). Bystanders are can be an important factor in the elimination of bullying and cyberbullying among school-aged children. Craig, Pepler, and Atlas (2000) stated “observational research has found that when bystanders intervene on behalf of the victim, they successfully abate victimization more than 50% of the time” (p. 22). Understanding why bystanders typically do nothing to assist victims is explained by the bystander effect. According to Tranell (2017) “(the bystander effect) means that if you are a part of a group of people who witness something cruel, you’re less likely to feel a personal responsibility to intervene” (p. 6).

A bystander is an individual who lacks participation in bullying scenarios as either the bully or victim and may actively intervene to stop the bully, encourage the bully to continue, or view bullying passively; bystanders can be either boys or girl (Polanin et al., 2012, p. 49). The presence of the bystander during an incident of bullying provides the opportunity to intervene. Bystanders support victims by reporting bullies to adults when participating in a setting specifically designed to change bullying behavior patterns through bystanders (Polanin et al., 2012, p. 49).

A study by Polanin et al. (2012) examined the treatment effects of bullying prevention programs on bystander intervention behavior. Empathy for the victim was also synthesized as a
secondary outcome but was not of primary purpose for the current review. The study included 12,874 children from the United States and Europe that were used in previous bystander intervention studies from the previous 30 years. The study used meta-analytic techniques to compare similar results from the previous research and the results revealed that the intervention behavior of bystanders increased (i.e., bystanders indicated greater intervention behavior in bullying situations) compared to control groups (Polanin et al., 2012, p. 59). The study by Polanin et al., (2012) indicated that bystanders can be a tremendous contributor to preventing and eradicating bullying incidents.

**Intervention Methods**

In a study by Ciucci and Baroncelli (2014), results suggest that anti (cyber) bullying programs and interventions focused on peer context will be more effective on boys dealing with the transition from childhood to adolescence, while interventions dealing with individual differences such as emotion-related personality traits (e.g., callous–unemotional traits) are more appropriate for girls (p.588).

**Second Step Middle School Program**

Espelage, Low, van Ryzin, and Polanin (2015), conducted a study involving middle school students to examine the effect of the social-emotional learning program Second Step Middle School Program. According to Espelage et al. (2015), “School-based social-emotional (SEL) programs that address interpersonal conflict and teach emotion management have succeeded in reducing youth aggression among elementary school youth, with few studies in middle schools” (p. 464). Teachers implemented 28 lessons (6th & 7th-grade) that focused on social emotional learning skills (e.g., empathy, problem-solving). Of the 3,651 students involved in the program, half of them were provided the social-emotional learning lessons throughout the
three-year study on bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic name-calling, and sexual harassment. The remaining students were used as a control group receiving no lessons throughout the three-year study. According to Espelage, Low, van Ryzin, and Polanin (2015), decreases in self-reported delinquency (intervening variable) over the first 2 years were significantly related to decreases in bullying, cyberbullying, and homophobic name-calling perpetration for Second Step schools across the 3-year study (p. 464).

**Olweus Bully Prevention Program**

Another program designed to prevent and stop current bullying incidents is used in many countries around the world. The Olweus Bully Prevention Program (OBPP) is a school-wide program that was designed in the 1980’s in Norway after three students committed suicide from being severely bullied in school. The OBPP statistically reduced bullying behavior within schools. According to Olweus and Limber (2010), “the primary goals of the OBPP are to reduce existing bullying problems among students at school, prevent the development of new bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school” (p. 126). There are four basic principles of the OBPP that are pivotal in implementing this successful anti-bullying program. Adults at school (and ideally, at home) should (a) show warmth and positive interest in their students; (b) set firm limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) use consistent nonphysical, non-hostile negative consequences when rules are broken; and (d) function as authorities and positive role models (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 126). Within the OBPP, there are levels that are integrated to ensure positive outcomes. These levels include school-level components, classroom-level components, individual-level components, and community-level components. Within each component, there are specific guidelines set up to prevent and react to any form of bullying.
School-level components. Within the school-level components of the OBPP, there are many steps that assist in alleviating any forms of bullying within the school setting. These steps include: establishing a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee (BPCC), conduct trainings for the BPCC and staff, administer the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, hold staff group meetings, introduce the school rules against bullying, review and refine the school’s supervisory system, hold a school-wide kick-off event to launch the program, and involve parents (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 127). These school-level components will establish a set of guidelines to prevent and act against bullying within the school setting.

Classroom-level components. The classroom-level components of the OBPP are designed and relegated to bullying prevention within a classroom setting. These components include: post and enforce school-wide rules against bullying, hold regular (weekly) class meetings to discuss bullying and related topics, and hold class-level meetings with students’ parents (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 127). These components will aid in the prevention of bullying at the classroom level and rely heavily on teacher involvement.

Individual-level components. The individual-level components of the OBPP are intensified to meet the needs of the individuals that are involved in any type of bullying. These components include: supervise students’ activities, ensure that all staff intervene on the spot when bullying is observed, meet with students individually that are involved in bullying, meet with parents of involved students, and develop individual intervention plans for involved students, as necessary (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 127). At this level, individuals will be held accountable for their actions in bullying, as well as, their parents to ensure everyone involved in the students’ lives are aware of the actions.
Community-level components. The community-level components of the OBPP are designed to include members within the community to get involved in the bullying prevention program. These components include: involve community members on the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee, develop school-community partnerships to support the school’s program, and help to spread anti-bullying messages and principles of best practice in the community (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 127). The involvement from members of the community will strengthen the program and the messages of the program within the school.

The OBPP has been set up and implemented in multiple countries across the world. Many of the studies performed on the OBPP have been from schools in Norway and the United States. The results of the studies have shown to have a positive effect on the prevention of bullying within schools. A number of large-scale studies from Norway provide compelling evidence of the program’s effectiveness in Norwegian schools. Likewise, the thrust of the findings in the U.S. studies has been that the OBPP has had a positive impact on students’ self-reported bullying behavior, antisocial involvement, being bullied, and propensities to report victimization to adults (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 129). The OBPP allows students a safe environment due to the responsive nature of the program in handling negative behaviors, such as bullying.

Three-tiered Model for Cyberbullying and Cyber Abuse

The Three-Tiered Model for Cyberbullying and Cyber Abuse is an intervention method designed and implemented based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. The three-tiered model provides a comprehensive plan that is both inclusive and individualized, depending on the tier. The model is systematic and is typically structured to provide primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of support (Davis & Schmidt, 2016, p. 370). The Three-Tiered Model is designed
to be incorporated into school curriculum and is used to screen students at-risk for cyberbullying tendencies and behaviors.

**Tier one.** According to Davis and Schmidt (2016)

Primary prevention includes a school wide definition of cyberbullying and cyber abuse, and an anti-bullying policy created and used by all students, parents, teachers, administrators, legal consultants, and support staff. School wide training on cyberbullying and cyber abuse and their effects are included in Tier 1. (p. 370)

In Tier One, students receive empathy and safety training/education. In addition, staff will screen all students at this time. At this time, parents will receive a letter describing cyberbullying and what the consequences will be if their child is involved in cyberbullying incidents. School staff will receive training on properly reporting and managing cyberbullying cases (p. 371).

**Tier two.** According to Davis and Schmidt (2016)

Tier Two is directed at students who have been identified as at-risk for being a cyberbully or a cyber victim. At this tier, it is important to design interventions that can be used across the school setting with students who do not respond to the Tier One strategies. (p. 371)

In Tier Two, at-risk cyberbullies will receive group instruction to work on skill sets generated towards positive relationships and self-regulation. For at-risk victims, students will receive group instruction generated towards self-esteem and resiliency.

**Tier three.** Tier Three is designed for chronic cyberbullies and cyber victims. According to Davis and Schmidt (2016)
In the third tier, individual intervention strategies are developed for students who demonstrate chronic patterns of bullying behaviors or have a chronic history of being a victim. It is in this tier that intervention becomes focused on individual student’s direct needs. (p. 372)

For the cyber victims, this may include individual counseling geared toward specific skills (i.e. resiliency, self-esteem, etc.), and meetings with the parent/guardian to discuss a plan of action. For the cyberbullies this may include individual counseling geared toward specific skills (i.e. empathy, self-esteem, self-worth), meetings with the parent/guardian to discuss a plan of action, and clarification of disciplinary action from the administrators or possible legal action if warranted (p. 372).

The Three-Tiered Model is designed to provide prevention and intervention for all stakeholders. This model is successful when students receive education on ethics and safety when using technology. Davis and Schmidt (2016) stated

There are many avenues for cyberbullying and cyber abuse to occur, and as professionals, it is vital to be knowledgeable about and current on social media trends and websites. The three-tiered model is proactive and allows school professionals to become leaders in helping train parents and students in responsible and safe use of technology. (p. 375)

**Cyberbullying Prevention Program**

The most effective intervention for any problem in schools would be to research intervention strategies that are proven to be successful and repeatable. The goal of the Cyberbullying Prevention Program is to formulate a new intervention based on the most effective parts of the previously used successful and repeatable interventions.
The Second Step Middle School Program (SSMSP) is a program that is used to combat cyberbullying through social-emotional learning. The program causes a drop in cyberbullying incidents due to educating students on the effects of cyberbullying through promoting empathy and building resiliency. Students that are able to exhibit empathy, as well as, retain resiliency through difficult social situations, will have the ability to maintain healthy relationships within their school community. The SSMSP will promote healthy relationships and discourage negative actions, such as cyberbullying, within the school and community.

Additionally, the Olweus Bully Prevention Program (OBPP) is a highly successful and highly researched program that is directed at combatting cyberbullying by utilizing four principles; (a) show warmth and positive interest in their students; (b) set firm limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) use consistent nonphysical, non-hostile negative consequences when rules are broken; and (d) function as authorities and positive role models. These four principles are designed to stop current cyberbullying incidents, prevent future incidents, and build healthy interpersonal relationships. The OBPP relies on complete staff buy-in and requires staff to intervene whenever bullying incidents occur.

Lastly, the Three-Tiered Model (TTM) is a program that is designed in congruence with the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. This model is unique in that it is a cyberbullying prevention program that is infused into the school curriculum and is designed to reach all students within the school. Having a cyberbullying prevention program designed into the school curriculum will ensure proper instruction is taking place and all teachers and administration are in alignment with the specific policy and procedures of the school in regards to cyberbullying. The TTM is proven to be successful due to having three layers of interventions that can be utilized at any time for any circumstance.
The Cyberbullying Prevention Program will incorporate proven and successful elements from the SSMSP, OBPP, and the TTM to attain the greatest level of effectiveness. The Cyberbullying Prevention Program will incorporate a three-tiered model incorporated into the school’s curriculum. The program will be based on the four principles used in the OBPP that have proven to be successful and require buy-in from all adults in the school. Finally, the program will base its anti-cyberbullying curriculum on social-emotional learning through promoting empathy and building resiliency. The Cyberbullying Prevention Program requires a school-wide buy-in from staff and students, as well as, being preventative in nature in addition to being highly reactive in responding to cyberbullying behaviors. The Cyberbullying Prevention Program will have a direct and precise schoolwide policy that will be readily available to all members of the school community to ensure for understanding and buy-in. Community support on the specific cyberbullying policy is an additional resource that will be beneficial in eliminating cyberbullying incidents and problems.

School Policies

School policies on bullying, in particular, cyberbullying is imperative for maintaining a positive school climate. According to Smith, Smith, Osborn and Samara (2008) the school anti-bullying policy is thus perceived as a framework for signaling the school’s commitment to anti-bullying work, organizing its response (including both proactive and reactive strategies), and communicating this to all stakeholders in the school community. However, previous research has indicated that the nature and quality of school policies varies widely, and there has been some skepticism about their effectiveness in impacting upon levels of bullying. (p. 2)
Smith et al. researched the progress and limitations of anti-bullying policies in 142 schools in the United Kingdom. The research suggested that the typical anti-bullying policy will provide a general statement about encouraging cooperative behavior or a good school climate; it will give a definition of bullying (but not making clear it is different from other forms of aggression), and will mention physical, verbal and relational bullying. It will also say if, when or how parents will be informed when a bullying incident occurs involving their child. On the other hand, it is unlikely to include guidance for response of anyone other than teaching staff to bullying incidents (i.e., other school staff, parents, pupil bystanders), follow-up of immediate responses, more general support for either victims or bullies, saying how records will be kept (who is responsible) and used, preventative roles of peer support or playground activities/lunchtime supervisors, and issues of inclusiveness (p. 9). Smith et al. (2008), also stated “schools would clearly benefit from more encouragement and guidance in maximizing the effectiveness of their anti-bullying policies” (p. 10). Schools with direct and precise policies in place in regard to bullying will benefit more than schools that do not have such policies in place. Additionally, parental involvement can have positive effects on dealing with the cyberbullying epidemic.

**Passive vs. Active School Approach**

The degree at which schools work to combat cyberbullying will determine how effective their anti-cyberbullying program will be. Schools that are passive with their response to cyberbullying incidents will be vulnerable to this progressive form of technological bullying. Schools that are passive in regards to cyberbullying tend to handle cyberbullying incidents as they would with traditional bullying incidents. Passive schools consider cyberbullying as simply an extension of face-to-face bullying and therefore it can be dealt with in the same way (Harrison 2016, p. 234). Additionally, most schools continue to take a utilitarian approach to
cyberbullying. The term ‘utilitarian’ refers to moral approaches that foreground ‘the greatest happiness principle’, in which the moral worth of an action is determined only by its resulting outcome. Popular approaches to dealing with cyberbullying in schools include warning students about the consequences of cyberbullying, restorative justice, referring pupils to the school counsellor and arranging meetings between the victim and the bully, so they can face up to their action (Harrison, 2016, p. 236). This utilitarian approach is not as effective in working with adolescents as adolescents typically do not consider consequences while being in the act of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has been widely viewed as impersonal, therefore consequences are not commonly considered by adolescents engaging in the act.

Contrarily, schools that take an active stance against cyberbullying will have more success in handling cyberbullying in their schools. Schools that are more active in dealing with cyberbullying use a “virtue ethics” stance in educating their students. Harrison (2016) explained virtue ethics refers to any moral theory that foregrounds the concepts of character and virtue. A virtue ethics-based educational approach would prioritize the creation of wise and virtuous online citizens. It would seek to provide children and young people with a set of tools to negotiate the inevitable conflicts and moral challenges of using the Internet. (p. 237)

Educating students to become responsible online citizens is an active approach that will be more successful in dealing with cyberbullying than the traditionally passive utilitarian approach.

**Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is imperative in the prevention of cyberbullying. Parents have the unique ability to monitor and educate their children about the use of technology outside of school. Many of the cyberbullying incidents taking place are occurring outside of school.
According to Robinson (2013), “parents’ involvement in the safe use of technology starts from a child’s first use, and they are a critical part of ensuring their teenage children’s responsible and safe use of online services as part of a whole-of-community response to cyberbullying” (p. 68). Furthermore, the “24/7” nature of cyberbullying highlights the importance of parental involvement, in partnership with schools, in preventing and addressing cyberbullying (Robinson, 2013, p. 69). School involvement will not be adequate enough in dealing with cyberbullying, because of the opportunity students have to use technology at any time of day.

Wright (2016), studied the effects of parental mediation on the use of technology by children and adolescents. Parental Mediation is defined as the strategies employed by parents to manage their children’s relationship with media (Wright, 2016, p. 346). Wright (2016) stated “Parental supervision, particularly parental mediation, buffers against the negative consequences related to adolescents’ victimization by cyberbullying” (p. 346). The study evaluated the different ways parents mediated their children’s use of technology. In addition, Wright (2016) explained

parental mediation protected against cyberbullying, especially when parents monitored and set rules concerning the websites that their children were allowed to visit. When parents utilized monitoring software and created rules with their children regarding the amount of time that their children could spend online, the children shared less personal information, which lessened their exposure to cyberbullying victimization. (p. 346)

The purpose of this study was to investigate the longitudinal buffering effect of different parental mediation strategies in the association between cyberbullying victimization and psychosocial adjustment difficulties (i.e. depression, anxiety, loneliness). Participants in this study were early adolescents in the eighth grade. Focusing on early adolescents is important as they have the
highest rates of cyberbullying involvement when compared to younger and older age groups. The participants of the study included 568 eighth grade students ages ranging from 13-15. The students were provided with questionnaires regarding face-to-face bully victimization, cyberbullying victimization, parental mediation of technology usage, depression, anxiety, and loneliness. The questionnaires were then analyzed using a structural regression model to test associations between the data received from the questionnaires that were completed by the participants. The results indicated that cyberbullying victimization was related positively to face-to-face victimization, depression, anxiety, loneliness. It was also associated negatively with co-viewing mediation and instructive mediation. Restrictive mediation was linked positively with depression, but it was related negatively to instructive mediation (Wright, 2016, p. 351). Wright (2016) explained that the finding concerning restrictive mediation might indicate that parents strictly enforce rules and potentially do not discuss ways to deal with the exposure to unwanted experiences through digital media, which is consistent with previous research (p. 354). “Restrictive mediation might be linked to the overprotective parenting style in which parents do not allow their children to develop problem-solving skills and social skills” (Wright, 2016, p. 354). The study by Wright (2016) suggests that different parental mediation styles will affect how children and adolescents react while using technology.

**Adlerian Perspective**

The fact that cyberbullying is a social problem stemming from an individual’s feelings of inferiority, vertical striving, and lack of social interest is highly relatable to Adlerian psychology. Alfred Adler’s concept of feelings of inferiority is a major construct as to why an individual chooses to cyberbully others. Oberst and Stewart (2003) explained that feelings of inferiority stem from a child that is discouraged. Additionally, Oberst and Stewart (2003), stated
“inferiority feelings arise when I compare myself with other people whom I perceive to be more skilled, accomplished, or better off than I am” (p. 23). Children involved in bullying others typically do so because they themselves feel inadequate when compared to their victims.

Likewise, vertical striving is another Adlerian concept that is deeply involved in why children may choose to bully others. Griffith and Powers (2007) described vertical striving as the vertical movement of self-elevation, regardless of the height it leads to, both in status and accomplishments, can never bring lasting satisfaction and inner peace. There is a constant danger of falling and failing: the gnawing feeling of real or possible inferiority is never eradicated, regardless of success. (p. 56)

Individuals that bully others are doing so in order to gain vertical movement over others in order to feel superior and powerful. However, this feeling of inferiority that leads to vertical striving will not bring satisfaction. Cyberbullying perpetrators bully their victims with the hope of gaining power and superiority but end up still feeling inferior and powerless.

Adler’s theory on social interest is characterized by having a genuine interest and contribution to the society that we belong to. As stated by Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964), “a positive social adjustment is thus a primary form of behavior where a developed capacity of social interest is utilized and is not the outcome of the conquest of selfish forces by social forces” (p. 134). Due to the selfish and harmful nature of cyberbullying, individuals that partake in bullying incidents lack social interest and, therefore, hinder their ability to belong in society. Adler would argue that cyberbullying behaviors are detrimental to society as a whole, and simply draw individuals away from social interest and feelings of belonging.
Implications for School Counselors

The role of the school counselor can be instrumental in combatting cyberbullying within the school environment. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), “professional school counselors promote the responsible use of technology in collaboration with families and educators to increase student safety” (ASCA, 2012, p. 53). School counselors advocate for students and act as change agents for school policies and procedures. For any school to properly deal with cyberbullying, there must be a specific policy in place for any cyberbullying that occurs in school, as well as, outside of school. Gallo, Rausch and Wood (2016) stated “School counselors also have an ethical responsibility to protect their students and safeguard them from harm (ASCA, 2010), which includes harm done through the use of technology” (p. 14). School counselors have the ability to ensure such policies are in place to effectively handle cyberbullying incidents. In addition, these policies must include ways for students to report cyberbullying anonymously.

As stated by Chibarro (2007)

once school policies are established and reporting procedures are in place, school counselors can address awareness and intervention strategies for school personnel, students, and parents. In some cases, school counselors may not be qualified to provide training for faculty and staff, but they should be able to bring about a heightened awareness of cyberbullying. (para. 14)

Additionally, awareness is one of the keys in reducing or eliminating school bullying, and parental awareness of cyberbullying can help aid school counselors' efforts to eradicate cyberbullying (Chibarro, 2007). With the assistance of parental involvement in the monitoring of internet usage, school counselors can focus more on in-school incidents of cyberbullying.
School counselors have the ability to proactively prevent cyberbullying incidents instead of reactively handling the effects of cyberbullying incidents that have already occurred. Lastly, school counselors not only need to address the needed support for victims, but also the perpetrators. Counseling students involved in cyberbullying is key in preventing the reoccurrence of cyberbullying incidents.

Additionally, school counselors must gain adequate knowledge regarding the digital world and how it affects the students that are engrossed in it. Technology use among adolescents is known to be high and an ever-present part of their lives (Lenhart, 2015). Palfrey and Gasser (2008) exclaimed:

For these young people, new digital technologies, computers, and cell phones are primary mediators of human-to-human connections. They have created a continuous network that blends human with technical to a degree we haven’t experienced before, and it is transforming human relationships in fundamental ways. (pp. 4-5)

Similarly, issues related to the digital world are commonplace in our society and the educational system is lagging behind in helping children become responsible digital citizens (Giedd, 2012). School counselors have a unique challenge with relating to their digitalized student body. Understanding the vast amount of social media sites (Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram) is imperative in delving into the lives and challenges privy to the new digitalized youth.

Conclusion

The emergence of a new form of bullying, labeled cyberbullying, is becoming an epidemic in schools due to the popularity of social networking sites and cell phones. Because of how quickly messages and information is delivered to large audiences, cyberbullying is detrimental to the mental health of the victims involved. Academic achievement is affected by
the rising cases in cyberbullying, because of the social nature of school. Cyberbullying victims often struggle with depression, anxiety, isolation and suicidal ideation. Much research has been performed on cyberbullying to discover effective ways for schools to deal with cyberbullying.

Specific bully prevention programs that have been proven to effectively combat bullying incidents are: The Second Step Middle School Program (SSMSP), The Olweus Bully Prevention Program (OBPP), and The Three-Tiered Model (TTM). These bully prevention programs have specific intervention techniques that schools can use to effectively manage bullying behaviors. The SSMSP uses social-emotional learning to build empathy and resilience in their students, which deters bullying behaviors within the school and community. The OBPP is a comprehensive school program designed with four basic principles that are understood and are adopted by all staff in the school. The OBPP is designed to constantly monitor students for bullying behaviors and deals with behaviors in a consistent and timely manner. The TTM is a program modeled after the Response to Intervention (RTI) model to ensure all students are educated and accounted for. There are three tiers in the TTM which includes: the entire student population, smaller targeted groups within the student population, and individual services for students that require additional individualized intervention skills.

The Cyberbullying Prevention Program (CPP) is an advanced anti-bullying model that encompasses the successful traits utilized by the SSMSP, OBPP, and TTM models. The CPP also includes a school-wide policy on bullying within the school and community that will be taught to all students and staff to ensure a systematic understanding of the no-tolerance position the school will take on bullying behaviors. The CPP will also be available to members of the community and parents will be expected to follow the guidelines set forth in the policy regarding their active involvement in their children’s use of technology.
Parental involvement is pivotal for maintaining a positive school climate. Parents have the unique ability to monitor and educate their children on proper use of technology. Setting rules and expectations on the use of technology for children have been proven to effectively combat cyberbullying and assists in the maintenance of healthy peer social relationships. Parents that utilize restrictive mediation in regards to technology use for their children can cause more harm than good for their children. Restrictive mediation may hinder the ability of children to develop appropriate problem-solving skills and social skills due to the overparenting nature of using restrictive mediation. Additionally, parents that model a healthy behavior when using technology will benefit their children’s understanding as to how to use technology in a healthy manner.

Adlerian psychology would argue that cyberbullying is a sign of inferiority and is a result of a lack of belonging in society. Individuals that choose to bully others focus on a vertical striving plane rather than living on a horizontal plane. Due to focusing on a vertical plane, individuals rely on overpowering their victims revealing weaknesses. A lack of social interest is evident in the use of cyberbullying tactics. A lack of social interest will further distance a person from achieving a safe and useful place in society. Individuals that feel they do not belong will act negatively in situations that call for a sense of belonging due to their feelings of inferiority.

For school counselors to effectively manage and understand students in today’s technological world, they must educate themselves on the multitude of social networking platforms and understand that the “online world” is a reality to today’s youth. School counselors cannot turn their back to the ever-changing digital world we live in. We must understand that the educational system is lagging behind in regards to the digital world and it is imperative that school counselors must make an attempt to catch up.
Main Points

- Cyberbullying is a relatively new method of bullying using modern communication technologies, primarily mobile phones and the Internet, to hurt others using such features as text messaging, voicemail, picture imaging, video clips, email, instant messenger, chat-rooms and websites, including social networking sites.
- Out-of-school interactions often lead to in-school altercations, thereby diminishing the quality of learning and affecting students, teachers and school personnel.
- Most bullying incidents directly or indirectly involve children and youth other than the victimized child and his or her perpetrators. Consequently, the behavior and attitudes of relevant peers, as manifested in group mechanisms and processes, are also important to consider.
- In reality, the suffering, hurt and agony victims undergo influences nearly every outlook of their existence leaving them feeling alone, isolated, endangered, depressed and anxious.
- Academically, cyberbullying can have negative effects on the victims due to the social nature of school. The higher academic achievement and self-esteem a student possesses, the lower the likelihood of that student being a victim of cyberbullying.
- Victims of cyberbullying and school bullying incurred a significantly higher risk of suicidal ideation, plans and attempts compared to those who had not encountered such threats.
- Studies have suggested that increased bullying of others is driven by the self-reported goals of acquiring and maintaining a high status, and of being dominant and popular.
• Perpetrators of cyberbullying act in a calculated and strategic manner. Therefore, these types of negative interactions with another person do not happen haphazardly.

• The actions of adults within a school setting are instrumental in the manifestation of cyberbullying in schools.

• Bullies and victims typically present an emotional reaction to stress, with the bully using external coping mechanisms, the victim using internal coping mechanisms and the bully/victim showing low levels of coping skills.

• The likelihood of being involved in cyberbullying as an adolescent increases with age, and pointed out that this risk particularly increases when the adolescent has a profile on a social networking site.

• Anti (cyber) bullying programs and interventions focused on peer context will be more effective on boys dealing with the transition from childhood to adolescence, while interventions dealing with individual differences such as emotion-related personality traits (e.g., callous–unemotional traits) are more appropriate for girls.

• The Second Step Middle School Program provided decreases in self-reported delinquency (intervening variable) over the first 2 years were significantly related to decreases in bullying, cyberbullying, and homophobic name-calling perpetration for Second Step schools across the 3-year study.

• The primary goals of the Olweus Bully Prevention Program (OBPP) are to reduce existing bullying problems among students at school, prevent the development of new bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school.
• The Three-Tiered Model is designed to provide prevention and intervention for all stakeholders. This model is successful when students receive education on ethics and safety when using technology.

• Schools with direct and precise policies in place in regards to bullying/cyberbullying will benefit more than schools that do not have such policies in place.

• Once school policies are established and reporting procedures are in place, school counselors can address awareness and intervention strategies for school personnel, students, and parents.

• In some cases, school counselors may not be qualified to provide training for faculty and staff, but they should be able to bring about a heightened awareness of cyberbullying.
References


