

Cyberbullying Among College Students

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Cyberbullying has emerged as a new and serious form of bullying and harassment. Cyberbullying occurs when a person or persons willingly use electronic technology to repeatedly harass or threaten another person or group by sending or posting hurtful text or pictures (Belsey, 2008). As the portability and accessibility of technology increases daily, the incidents of cyberbullying rise. Victims can be attacked via chat rooms, websites, instant messages, blogs or cellphones. CITIA, International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry (2010), reported that wireless use in the U. S. increased 78% from 2005 to 2009, with 276.6 million subscribers and more than 1.36 trillion SMS messages. One of the most popular social media websites, Facebook (2010), reported over 3.5 billion web links, new stories, blog posts, notes, and photos shared each week by its more than 350 million users. Unfortunately, as the usage of technology multiplies the incidents of cyberbullying increases. Hinduja & Patchin (2006) reported that almost 30% of the adolescents in their study had been victims of cyber bullying. Wolak, Mictchell, & Finkelhor (2007) assert that in their 2007 study, 43% of youth stated they had experienced cyberbullying in the past year via the internet, cell phones, or other technology.

Characteristics of Cyber bullying

Although cyberbullying is a form of bullying, there are several characteristics that distinguish it from traditional bullying. One of the main characteristics is the bully's ability to remain anonymous. Cyberbullies are able to harass their victims without the victims ever knowing who or why they are being cyberbullied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Oftentimes, the perpetrator is oblivious to the harm he or she causes his or her victim (Slonje & Smith, 2007; Williard, 2004). Others blindly intensify the harm inflicted on the victim by sharing a photo, retweeting a post, or liking a negative status posted by someone else. Anonymity also lessens opportunity for direct feedback and significantly reduces the chance of bystander intervention and empathy or remorse from the perpetrator (Williard, 2004). In addition to the bully's ability to remain anonymous, the victim experiences more difficulty getting away from his or her abuser. Various forms of technology allow the victim to be continually victimized via text messages or emails. Unlike traditional incidents of bullying, cyberbullying has the potential to reach thousands of individuals quickly (Slonje & Smith (2007). The characteristics of cyberbullying compounds the effects of cyberbullying on the victim especially when the audience participates in the bullying by participating in the online conversation, forwarding text messages, and/or reposting comments made. When the bully gains an audience, it seems impossible for the victim to stop the abuse. Consequently, there is no easy way to find the source of the cyberbullying, stop others from sharing the information, or to eradicate the information permanently.

Characteristics of Bullies and Victims

The psychological impact of cyberbullying on its victims is similar to traditional bullying. It includes low self esteem, depression, anger, anxiety, academic difficulties, school avoidance, school violence, and suicide (Beran & Li, 2005). According to Olweus (1999), victims typically are physically weaker and dislike violence. Youth who are anxious, small in stature, withdrawn, insecure, physically weak or victims of traditional bullying are at risk for cyberbullying (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). Piskin (2002) asserts that bullies often experience unnurturing home environments and physical violence at home, while victims have nurturing, overprotective parents. Bullies are characterized as unempathetic (Bernstein, & Watson, 1997) and aggressive. They use this aggression to establish power and dominance over their victims (Juvonen, Graham, & Shuster, 2003). According to Ybarra & Mitchell (2004), cyberbullying is commonly committed by individuals who were previous victims of cyberbullying or traditional bullying. Sometimes the victims retaliate by cyberbullying those who they believe cyberbullied them as well as other victims. Others participate in cyberbullying to demonstrate their cyberskills; this provides them a sense of power or competence. Many enjoy the vicarious attention given from peers as they witness others talking about or sharing their work. Still, others engage in cyberbullying due to peer pressure (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

Prevalence on College Campuses

The research on cyber bullying among college students is limited. According to Finn (2004), 10 to 15% of 339 students at the University of New Hampshire reported receiving repeated email or instant messages that threatened, harassed, or insulted them. He stated that more than half the students reported receiving unwanted pornography. Dilmac (2009) reported that 22.5% of 666 students at Selcuk University in Turkey reported cyberbullying another person at least once and 55.35% reported being a victim of cyberbullying at least once. At Indiana State University, 22 % of survey students stated they had been cyberbullied, while 42% reported that they knew someone who had been cyberbullied (Pena, 2011). According to MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman (2010), of the 439 participants, 38% of college students knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 21.9% had been cyberbullied, and 8.6% had cyberbullied others.

Impact on College Students

Just as cyberbullying among college students and other young people have the same impacts, cyberbullying and traditional bullying affect victims similarly. The impacts of bullying are major as bullying is associated with major health and psychological issues such as depression, emotional distress, low self-esteem, and poor academic achievement (Mason, 2008). Bullying victims generally exhibit psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, school phobias, and social anxiety (Greene, 2003). Although, cyberbullying is linked to serious effects, like low self esteem, family problems, academic problems, school violence and delinquent behavior, the worst consequence is suicide and violence (Patchin & Hinduja, 2008). This tragic consequence occurred on September 12, 2010, when a Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi committed suicide after being recorded on a webcam having an intimate encounter with another male student (Pena, 2011).

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Even without cyberbullying, attending college can be very stressful for young adults. For victims of cyberbullying stress is intensified. Many victims often do not report the incidents of cyberbullying. Typically when the cyberbullying becomes unbearable, young adults tell someone about the incidents (Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). Because college students regularly use

technology, it is likely cyberbullying will continue to increase. In response to this epidemic, college campuses must find creative ways to prevent cyberbullying from occurring and to intervene early when it has occurred. The first steps towards preventive measures should be to clearly define Cyberbullying, outline consequences for the action, and develop policies to protect the victims as well as hold the aggressor accountable for his or her actions.

In addition to identification and policy development, prevention efforts can be composed of collaboration among the college counseling center, the counseling, social work, and psychology departments. Collectively, these entities can meet and produce a prevention and intervention plan. Many researchers have identified prevention and intervention programs, however, most of the programs focus on youth in elementary, middle, and high schools. Some of the programs are as follows: the i-SAFE Internet Safety Program (i-SAFE Inc., 1989), Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum (Kolwalski & Agatston, 2008, 2009), and Lets Fight It Together: What We All Can Do to Prevent Cyberbullying (Childnet, 2007). The Anti-Defamation League has developed several prevention /intervention programs that can be utilized for parents, educators and youth (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). Many of these plans can be adapted to fit the university environment. According to the Anti-Defamation League (2007), the prevention plan may include the following components:

- Cyberbullying prevention education rally's every semester
- Brochures, posters, webpage announcements about cyberbullying
- Updating policies to include guidelines for internet and cellphone use, and consequences of cyberbullying
- Encourage reporting of cyberbullying
- Developing a center for violence prevention and intervention

It is important to take a serious look at this growing problem and develop effective methods to decrease its impact on college campuses. Student input is especially germane in this process as student led initiatives may increase awareness and gain support. Additionally, the plan should be continuously evaluated to assess its effectiveness.

Decreasing cyberbullying incidents is a long and arduous task, thus, colleges and universities should have intervention methods readily available when incidents occur. As recommended by the Anti-Defamation League (2007), intervention methods can include the following:

- Immediately responding when cyberbullying is reported
- Provide counseling to the victims
- Provide counseling to the perpetrators
- Determine consequences in accordance with university policies
- Hold town hall meeting and /or group counseling sessions to help students cope with incident

Recommendations and Conclusions

Because of the widespread use and accessibility of technology among college students, cyberbullying is a serious problem. Cyberbullying often leads to death, violence, and student dropout on college campuses, for these reasons it is imperative that colleges and universities address this issue before it festers in to any form of violence or harassment. It is recommended

that research on the impact and prevalence of cyberbullying among college students be conducted. It is imperative that entities on the college campus collaborate on prevention and intervention strategies to help combat this issue. Education and awareness is the key to decreasing cyberbullying on college campuses.

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