

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Should I Tell on my Peers? Student Experiences and
Perceptions of Cyberbullying

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Psychology at
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Gillian M. Harrison

2013

Abstract

Over the last decade, researchers have found that some adolescents are being bullied not only by traditional methods but also via electronic communication devices. This study provides an overview of student responses to a survey regarding cyberbullying, and explores the reasons students are often reluctant to report victimisation to adults. It includes both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from self-report surveys developed to measure the prevalence of cyberbullying, the media most frequently used for cyberbullying, the nature and content of offensive communications, the extent of reporting victimisation, and student views on preventing and reducing cyberbullying. A total of 154 students aged 13 to 18 years old from three schools in the Bay of Plenty participated in the study. The results provide some insights into the reasons that adolescents often do not tell an adult about being cyberbullied. The main reasons for not telling appear to be beliefs that peers can help more than an adult as well as a culture in which telling an adult may be considered "ratting". Student views on how schools can best deal with cyberbullying involved issues of confidentiality and safety, appropriate discipline, and ensuring school-wide awareness of anti-bullying procedures. These views offer valuable feedback with the potential to inform current anti-bullying programmes.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors Dr. Jane Prochnow and Dr. Keith Greaney for their patience and encouragement. I thank them both for the opportunity they have given me to learn about the process of conducting research and presenting the data.

I also thank all the students who gave up their free time to participate in this study, and the school principals who agreed to participate and allowed the survey to be conducted in their school.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures and Tables	vii
Introduction	1
Literature Review	
Traditional Bullying	2
Adolescent Use of Electronic Media	11
Electronic Media and Bullying	12
Definition of Cyberbullying	15
Overlap Between Bullies and Victims	19
Overlap Between Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying	20
Prevalence of Bullying	22
Gender Differences	25
Age of Adolescents Experiencing Cyberbullying	27
Characteristics of Cyberbullies	28
Characteristics of Cybervictims	29
Effects of Cyberbullying	30
Bystanders and Bullying	32
Reporting Incidents of Victimisation	33
Cyberbullying and Youth Suicide in New Zealand	35
Harmful Speech, Bullying and New Zealand Laws	37
Present Study	41

Method	
Measures	42
Procedures	43
School Setting	44
Participants	47
Materials	47
Data Analysis	49
Results	
Prevalence of Cyberbullying	51
Electronic Media Used for Cyberbullying	53
Nature and Content of Cyberbullying Messages	53
Extent of Reporting Victimization	54
Student Views on how to Prevent or Reduce Cyberbullying	63
Discussion	
Prevalence of Cyberbullying	68
Electronic Media Used for Cyberbullying	68
Nature and Content of Cyberbullying Messages	71
Extent of Reporting Victimization	72
School Policies and Intervention Programmes	77
Recommendations	80
Limitations and Improvements	83
Conclusion	86
Areas for Future Research	89
References	91

Appendices

Appendix A: Cyberbullying Survey	106
Appendix B: Ethics Approval	121
Appendix C: Letter of Invitation and Research Outline to Principals	122
Appendix D: Principal Consent Form	125
Appendix E: School Newsletter Notice	126
Appendix F: Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers	127
Appendix G: Information Sheet for Classroom Display	128
Appendix H: Information Sheet for Students	130
Appendix I: School A - Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures	131
Appendix J: School B - Harassment Prevention and Network Safety Policies	140
Appendix K: School C - Discipline Policy and Goals	143

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1	Comparison of ethnic heritage between participants and the national population	47
Table 1	Summary of studies discussed in depth	7
Table 2	Frequency of cyberbullying	51
Table 3	Frequency of cyberbullying by age	52
Table 4	Frequency and type of cyberbullying	54
Table 5	Frequency of reporting victimisation	55
Table 6	Frequency of reasons for telling a friend and not an adult about cyber-victimisation	56
Table 7	Student expectations about parental response to cyber-victimisation	58
Table 8	Victim expectations about parental response to cyber-victimisation	59
Table 9	Victim views of parent and teacher technological knowledge	60
Table 10	Student views of teacher/school staff ability to help cybervictims	61
Table 11	Victim views of teacher/school staff ability to help cybervictims	62
Table 12	Student views on the actions teachers should take in response to cyberbullying	65
Table 13	Student views of the actions schools can take to deal with cyberbullying	66