



# New bottle but old wine: A research of cyberbullying in schools

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## Abstract

This study investigates the nature and the extent of adolescences' experience of cyberbullying. A survey study of 177 grade seven students in an urban city is conducted. In this paper, “cyberbullying” refers to bullying via electronic communication tools. The results show that almost 54% of the students were victims of traditional bullying and over a quarter of them had been cyber-bullied. Almost one in three students had bullied others in the traditional form, and almost 15% had bullied others using electronic communication tools. Almost 60% of the cyber victims are females, while over 52% of cyber-bullies are males. Majority of the cyber-bully victims and bystanders did not report the incidents to adults.

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## 1. Introduction

School violence is a serious social problem both in Europe (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997; Hoover & Juul, 1993) and North America (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995; Hoover & Olsen, 2001). This problem is particularly persistent and acute during junior high/middle school period (National-Center-for-Educational-Statistics, 1995). Possible reasons explaining this high frequency of school violence include the drastic biological and social changes experienced by adolescents.

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[A]dolescence is a period of abrupt biological and social change. Specifically, the rapid body changes associated with the onset of adolescence and changes from primary to secondary school initiate dramatic changes in youngster's peer group composition and status. Changes in peer group availability, individuals' status within groups, and peer support confront youngsters as they are entering new, larger, and typically impersonal secondary schools. One way in which peer status is achieved in these sorts of environments, especially by boys, is through the selective use of aggression and other agonistic strategies.

(Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000)

Much of school violence, particularly during adolescence, involves students bullying their peers (Boulton, 1999). According to Hoover and Olsen, "up to 15% of students in American schools are frequently or severely harassed by their peers. . . . Only a slim majority of 4th through 12th graders . . . (55.2%) reported neither having been picked on nor picking on others" (Hoover & Olsen, 2001). Further, bully-victim cycles are found where individuals are both bullies and victims (Ma, 2001; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993; Schwartz, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1997). More importantly, it is reported that in many school-shooting cases, bullying played a major role (Dedman, 2001).

## **2. The problem of cyberbullying**

The use of the new technology such as the Internet and cell phones has increased dramatically in recent years. In education, the increasing access to new technology can increase students' social interaction and enhance collaborative learning experiences. Substantial research studies have shown that computers in classrooms can have positive effects on learning of all subjects. The introduction of electronic communication into classrooms, however, also brings problems that deserve our attention. One such issue concerns the increasing serious cyberbullying problem in schools, i.e., the use of electronic communication devices to bully others.

Although many teachers and administrators now recognize the problem of school bullying, few are aware that students are being harassed through electronic communication (Beran & Li, 2005). Parallel to this lack of awareness by school professionals, researchers have yet to examine the nature of cyberbullying. The growing number and the level of severity of cyberbullying call for our educators, researchers, administrators and authorities to take actions.

But before we can tackle this problem, a better understanding of the issue is necessary. Because cyberbullying is a new territory, we know little about it. This study, hence, investigates the nature and the extent of adolescences' experience of cyberbullying. A survey study of 177 grade seven students in an urban city is conducted. In this paper, "bullying" refers to bullying in the traditional sense and "cyberbullying" refers to bullying via electronic communication tools.

### *2.1. Related literature*

Bill Belsey, who developed the award-winning webpage [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), defined cyberbullying in his recently published website [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca):

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