CyberBullying: Policies and Practice

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The Prevention of Bullying in Gauteng Schools

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“Violence is a multi-faceted problem with physical, social, psychological and environmental roots. To put an end to violence we must look at it from multiple levels and from different sectors of society” (Hammed 2007)
Public perception are fuelled by media reports of stabbings, shootings and murders. These are isolated, high profile and sensationalized incidents, and are not where the problem lies.

The real problem lies in the apparently minor, but repetitive acts of violence. It is these acts which lead to the most frequent consequences of violence in schools: drop-out, truancy, school phobia, depression and lack of self-confidence amongst students (Debarbieaux).
“Repeated negative, ill-intentioned behavior by one or more students directed against a student who has difficulty defending himself or herself. Most bullying occurs without any apparent provocation on the part of the student who is exposed.” (Olweus)
Bullying generally refers to REPEATED acts of violence (physical, emotional, psychological) and to an UNEQUAL POWER or SOCIAL STATUS RELATIONSHIP – The bullied party is unable to, or finds it difficult to, defend him or herself.
From Offline to Online Violence
Cyber Bullying

• Problematizing the concept

Bullying?
Aggression?
Harassment?
Sexting?
Happy slapping?
Cyber Bullying

- Any discomfort or harm **intentionally** and **repeatedly** inflicted on a specific person/group (i.e. A pattern of behaviour)
- Specifically, any type of harassment or bullying, including teasing, slandering, making fun of, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumours, or making threatening or aggressive comments via any of the following:
  - Text messages (SMS);
  - Pictures or video clips via mobile phone cameras;
  - Phone calls;
  - E-mails;
  - Chat rooms;
  - Instant messages (IM’s) (e.g. MSN, Yahoo)
  - Websites and blogs;
  - Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, Google+, Twitter)
  - Internet gaming.
Cyber Bullying

• Generally taken to include, amongst others:
  – Flaming
  – Denigration
  – Harassment
  – Impersonation
  – Outing
  – Stalking
  – Happy slapping
Key Differences between Bullying and Cyber Bullying

• Adaptability and persistence of content
  – Editable, alterable
• Distributability of content
  – Speed
  – Breadth
• Dis-inhibition over computer-mediated communication
• Invasive
• Invisibility, disassociation with consequences

(Pew Internet and American Life Project)
The Impact of Cyber Bullying

• While not yet fully understood, sufficient evidence to suggest impact similar to offline bullying
• More likely than other to:
  – Use alcohol and other drugs
  – Have problems at school
  – Skip school
  – Experience in-person victimization
  – Report weaker emotional bonds with caregivers

(Centre for Disease Control)
The Impact of Cyber Bullying

• Also:
  – Impaired concentration
  – Truancy
  – Anxiety and fear
  – Loneliness and isolation
  – Substance abuse
  – Weapon carrying

(Kowalski, Limber & Agatson)
Observations and Myths

– High correlation between in-school bullying and cyber-bullying (Willard 2006)

– Bullies in school are more often cyber-bullies, and victims in schools are more often victims in chatrooms (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007)

– No evidence that cyber-bullying is more pervasive than 'conventional' bullying (Lenhart, 2007)

– Can be controlled, restricted

“...the internet is often criticized as a sinister world where naïve teens fall prey to various assorted malevolent forces, or teens are vilified for using the internet to indulge their darkest and widest impulses below the radar of parental authority.”

(Boyd, Ryan & Leavitt (2011))
EXTENT

- 37% of young people experienced some form of cyber aggression at home or school in a 12 month period
- Young people are more susceptible to cyber aggression outside of school (42.9%), than at school, unlike “school-yard” bullying
- Most commonly through sms (25.6%), IM (12.2%) and chat rooms (11.7%)

(all CJCP 2010)

REPORTING

- Reporting levels very low due to fear that hardware will be taken aware/access restricted (Ybarra 2007)
- Also seen as irrelevant, what Boyd (2011) calls “just a drama”, rather than anything serious that needs to be dealt with
- When reported, most commonly to friends (50%), then parents (40%), then educators (2%) (NMMU)
Key issues in responding to cyber bullying

• Towards a balanced approach
• Shifting focus from technology to behaviour
• Problematizing cyber bullying
• Developing evidence-based approaches to cyber bullying
Hey!

What did you do?

Painted his cellphone screen black. He can still use the speed-dial.

"Sexting": latest teen fad.
Towards an evidence based approach

• Response largely instinctual, intuitive, often based on moral panic

• Comparisons to the many well-intentioned but ineffective crime and violence prevention responses

– Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), Scared Straight etc…
Towards an evidence based approach

• Some lessons:
  – Beware a rush to develop/fund intuitively appealing programmes out of a panic to get into the field;
  – Develop internet safety curricula around strategies we know work;
  – Consider creative, multi-faceted approaches to internet safety education
  – Apply rigorous evaluation to all promising programmes
Characteristics of successful prevention campaigns

1. Grounded in theoretical framework
2. Focus on concrete skills development
3. Consist of different components for different audiences
4. Interactive strategies
5. Comprehensive and coherent
6. Exceeds 20 hours with target audience
Characteristics of UN-successful campaigns

- Exclude early age groups (9-12 years)
- Are un-gendered in their approach
- Induce fear
- Limited to changing attitudes
- Are too general

(Lunar and Finkelhor, School-based prevention programmes: Lessons for Child Victimization)
School pointers

• Develop a school policy on acceptable and appropriate use of ICT
• Training on recognition of symptoms and signs, and management thereof
• Integration of cyberbullying into anti-bullying strategies
• Provide support to victims and bullies
THANK YOU

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