



The impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health

Research Summary

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Introduction

The PEAR group is a public health reference group of young people supported by the NCB (National Children's Bureau) Research Centre, with funding from the Wellcome Trust. This summary provides a brief review of the findings from a research project PEAR commissioned to explore the impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health. The full report is available from the PEAR website (www.ncb.org.uk/PEAR)



The Research

Research questions

- What are the links between cyber and other forms of bullying?
- How aware are parents about cyber-bullying?
- What do schools do to monitor and deal with cyber-bullying?
- Does cyber-bullying affect the way young people use technology?
- Does increasing use of technology make cyber-bullying worse?
- Why might bullies choose cyber-bullying as opposed to other methods?
- Are there any differences in experiences of cyber-bullying for different groups of young people, e.g. boys and girls?

Methods

A web-based questionnaire and 2 group discussions in which **490 young people participated.**

A questionnaire sent to a selection of secondary schools and colleges - **11 responded.**

The key findings

- Many more girls than boys said they had experienced cyber-bullying in some way.
- Of those who said they had been affected by cyber-bullying the most common effect was to their confidence, self-esteem and mental and emotional well-being.
- More than a quarter of those who had been cyber-bullied said that they had stayed away from school and over a third told us that they had stopped socialising outside school because of it.
- Of those who had been cyber-bullied, over half had sought support mainly from parents and friends.
- Most young people thought that cyber-bullying was as harmful as traditional bullying but some felt that it did not exist and was down to the victim's ability to cope with it.
- The main reason given by young people for why bullies may choose this method is that 'they think they will not get caught'.

How PEAR were involved

- PEAR recruited researchers at Anglia Ruskin University to help them do the research and together they became the 'research team'.
- The research team designed the questionnaires, analysed the data and presented the findings at the PEAR conference through role-play using quotes from the young participants in the research. More details on this process can be found in the full research report (see link below).

What we found

Young people's experience of cyber-bullying

- **18.4%** of young people in the research said that they had been cyber-bullied and more of these were girls (**69%**). More girls had also 'witnessed cyber-bullying', 'known somebody who had been cyber-bullied' or 'known somebody who had cyber-bullied others'. **48.4%** of boys had not experienced any form of cyber-bullying compared to **30.1%** of girls.



Effects of cyber-bullying

- Of those who said they **had** been affected by cyber-bullying the most common effect was to their confidence, self-esteem and mental and emotional well-being.
- Over a quarter of those who had been cyber-bullied (**28.8%**) told us that they had stayed away from school and over a third (**38.9%**) had stopped socialising outside school as a result of cyber-bullying.

Staying safe when using social media

- Although many young people admitted to worrying about cyber-bullying, many more did not worry about it. Some key strategies used by young people to deal with cyber-bullying included; changing or blocking their instant messenger, email addresses and mobile numbers; being careful who they gave their personal details to and reporting the incident to an adult.

Seeking support

- Of those who had sought support to deal with cyber-bullying, most said that they had spoken to their parents/carers. More girls spoke to their friends. Nearly half had approached a teacher or someone else in school.
- Reasons for not seeking support included a fear of making the cyber-bullying worse & being able to deal with the incident themselves.

"Cyber-bullying is basically still verbal bullying and is definitely psychological bullying. Any bullying is psychological though, really. And any bullying is going to *be harmful*"
(Girl)

Cyber-bullying and traditional bullying

- Most young people thought cyber-bullying was just as harmful as other forms of bullying (74.4%). Some thought it was worse because this bullying is in black and white, could get very personal and involve many more people more quickly. They also thought it was secretive which can cause fear in the victim.
- A number of young people felt that, for some victims, it was 'their own fault'.
- 69.1% thought that cyber-bullies did not actually think they were bullying, believing it to be merely a form of 'harmless fun', a joke and therefore not an issue.

"I think it's worse because people find it easier to abuse someone when not face to face (Boy)

"yes because we learning more and more of people killing themselves over this" (Boy)

- 46.5% thought cyber-bullying was becoming more of a problem. Reasons included an increase in internet/technology use, a concern for their friends, and cyber-bullying being secretive and easy.

- When young people were asked why they thought some bullies might choose cyber bullying instead of traditional forms, most responded that 'they think they won't get caught' (78.9%). More girls chose the option 'they can bully others less obviously' and 'the victim can't escape from it'. When providing more details, young people included being 'a coward', cyber-bullying being a 'much easier' option and the fact that it's 'secretive' as reasons.



Schools/colleges awareness

- 64.9% said their schools/colleges were aware that cyber-bullying goes on but some said their schools/colleges turned a blind eye to it.

"my school hide and say that bullying doesn't go on" (Boy)

"my college runs its own anti cyber-bullying committee"(Girl)

- 44% felt their schools/colleges did enough to deal with cyber-bullying in terms of being proactive in dealing with it as episodes occur.

- **8 out of the 11** participating schools were confident that they were proactive in dealing with cyber-bullying.

Parents/carers awareness

- **64.4%** believed their parents/carers were aware that cyber-bullying goes on.
- To increase awareness among parents/carers, young people suggested '*more information*,' firstly via the media (e.g. TV, leaflet drops, on news bulletins) and secondly via schools in the form of newsletters and meetings with teachers.

Recommendations

Practical/policy recommendations

- Develop educational programmes around awareness for young people, parents/carers and schools.
- Deliver education that brings together young people and their families to enhance communication in relation to online media.
- Educate young people about what constitutes acceptable behaviour on line.
- Implement the advice provided by young people in this project.
- Support young people to report incidents of cyber-bullying through other young people who could help change attitudes and provide a source of support to young people.
- Develop policies that stress the importance of developing values of care and kindness amongst young people.

Recommendations for further research

- Work with the victims of cyber-bullying to gain more in-depth knowledge about the effects of cyber bullying on mental health and well being.
- Explore the characteristics of the 'victims' of cyber-bullying to tease out what makes some more resilient to cyber-bullying than others.
- Seek to learn more about understanding the bullying behaviour of cyber-bullies.
- Explore the anonymity of cyber-bullying - is it real or perceived?



Involving young people in research

- More time needs to be provided by funders.
- Negotiate a clear understanding of the role of each member of the team at the beginning of the project.

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More information

For the full report on this research and more information about the **PEAR project**: www.ncb.org.uk/PEAR

For more details about the research please contact

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For more information about the **NCB Research Centre**:
www.ncb.org.uk/research or email research@ncb.org.uk

For information about staying safe online:

<http://www.bullying.co.uk/index.php/young-people/cyberbullying/>
www.thinkuknow.co.uk
<http://www.digizen.org/resources/>

If you need help or advice about dealing with bullying:

Young NCB: www.youngncb.org.uk/need_to_talk.aspx

Information for young people from NCB on getting help if you need to talk

Cybermentors: www.cybermentors.org.uk

CyberMentors is a safe social networking site providing information and support for young people affected by bullying.

ChildLine : www.childline.org.uk, phone 0800 1111

ChildLine is the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people. They offer advice and support, by phone and online, 24 hours a day

The Young Anti-Bullying Alliance is a group of children and young people from all around the country determined to put an end to bullying. Supported by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, they have their own **website**: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/young_anti-bullying_alliance.aspx

Connexions Direct: www.connexions-direct.com, phone 080 800 13219

For young people aged 13-19, including information on dealing with bullying and staying safe online

Samaritans: www.samaritans.org, phone: 08457 90 90 90