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

Final Report

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Glossary table

Term	Meaning
Commission (in research)	Asking a person/group of people to carry out some research
Data	Information
Data analysis	Working with the data to try to understand the experiences of participants in the research
Dissemination:	Telling others about research and research findings
Focus Group	An interview with a group of people who have something in common (in this case something to say about cyber-bullying)
Framework analysis	Where the data is arranged in relation to the key themes identified by the research questions.
Literature Review	A large search of all the information on a topic from book chapters, journals, databases and others
Participatory Action Research	Bringing together researchers and others to carry out research to make a real difference
Qualitative methods	Where data is gathered generally form a small group of people and it is not analysed using statistical means e.g. interviews, focus groups.
Quantitative methods	Where data is generally gathered form a large number of people and analysed using statistics e.g. questionnaire.

1. Introduction

This report tells the story of how a research project, commissioned and led by a group of young people called PEAR, was carried out. PEAR (Public health, Education, Awareness, Research) was an NCB Research Centre[1] project which supported young people's involvement in public health research with funding support from the Wellcome Trust and the Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC)[2]. The PEAR group were 20 young people, aged 13–18, from London and Leeds, who met approximately four times a year during school holidays during 2008-2010. The project sought to:

- Help young people to learn about, inform and influence public health research and policy

- Develop links between young people and public health researchers and policy makers

- Produce and distribute information about public health issues and research to young people

- Demonstrate the impact of young people's involvement in public health research, and how this can be applied to policy and practice

The group was involved in a range of activities including training in research skills, working with public health researchers and policy-makers on adult-led research projects, organising a conference for adults and young people to discuss young people's involvement in public health and other research, and developing a website about the project (www.ncb.org.uk/PEAR).

A key element of the project was the ring fencing of a proportion of the budget for a project or other activity around young people and public health. The group chose to use this budget to commission a research project where they would have overall control and the opportunity to be involved throughout the process. As part of their work with the PHRC, PEAR had identified what they saw as the main public health issues for young people - mental health and bullying were identified as two of the key issues. Following discussion with NCB Research

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[1] www.ncb.org.uk/research
[2] http://www.york.ac.uk/phrc/

Centre staff and PHRC researchers, the young people decided that they would like to commission a research project to explore the impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health. They had not found much research on this new form of bullying, and thought that it might still be relatively invisible or inaccessible to adult researchers. The group also felt that, as most of the research on bullying and mental health starts from an adult perspective, they wanted to commission their own research project. PEAR worked with NCB Research Centre staff to draft the project specification, short-list proposals and select and commission Anglia Ruskin University to carry out this project with them.

This project is one of few, where young people have commissioned the research and participated as researchers. Although the young people did not carry out the day to day work on the project they were responsible for leading and shaping it.

The overall aim of the project was to understand the impact of cyber-bullying on the mental health of young people aged 12-18, from a public health perspective. Within this PEAR wanted to explore:
- The links between cyber and other forms of bullying
- How aware parents were about cyber-bullying?
- What schools do to monitor and deal with cyber-bullying?
- Whether cyber-bullying affects the way in which young people use technology?
- Does increasing use of technology, and new technology, make cyber-bullying worse?
- Why bullies might chose cyber-bullying as opposed to other methods?
- Whether there were any differences in experiences of cyber-bullying for different groups of young people, e.g. boys and girls?

Firstly, the literature will be explored in relation to cyber-bullying and young people's mental health. The process will be described and the findings presented. We will then discuss these findings with references made to key

texts and literature and finally our recommendations and conclusions will be presented.

2. Cyber-bullying in the literature

The key points from the literature:

- Cyber-bullying has some shared characteristics with traditional bullying such as repetition, power imbalance and intention.

- Cyber-bullying is also different to traditional bullying because it is:
  Anonymous
  Rapid
  Victims cannot escape from it

- When young people are involved in sending nasty text messages and emails about another young person they might not be aware of the potential harm they are causing to them

- Bullying in all forms can have a negative effect on a young persons mental health.

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will discuss bullying in the traditional sense before moving specifically onto cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying and young people, as well as the unique characteristics of cyber-bullying, will then be explored. We will finish this review by examining the characteristics of perpetrators and victims as well as the emotional and psychological consequences of cyber-bullying.

A literature search was undertaken using key databases and specific research journals and book chapters with keywords such as 'young people and…'

- 'Cyber-bullying'
- 'Mental health'
- 'Public health'
- 'Text bullying'
- 'Internet bullying'.

The literature search showed a mixture of quantitative studies using mainly self-report questionnaires with either pre-existing large scale cohorts or samples as well as qualitative studies based upon the in-depth accounts of young people to capture their experiences.

2.2 What is 'traditional' bullying?

Despite the fact that research into bullying, in particular school bullying, has become a global phenomenon over the last 30 years, an agreed definition of what exactly bullying is has still not been agreed (O'Brien, 2009). In the UK for example, no robust national statistics exist for reported cases of bullying in schools and this is, to a large extent, related to the absence of an agreed definition of bullying (OFSTED, 2003; Cowie and Jennifer, 2008). The House of Commons (2007) propose that defining what bullying is and identifying the instances of bullying is the first potential barrier to be overcome in successfully dealing with the problem. The definition used by the DfES states that bullying is:

> "Repetitive, wilful or persistent behaviour intended to cause harm, although one-off incidents can in some cases also be defined as bullying; Intentionally harmful behaviour, carried out by an individual or a group; and An imbalance of power leaving the person being bullied feeling defenceless. Bullying is emotionally or physically harmful behaviour and includes: name-calling; taunting; mocking; making offensive comments; kicking; hitting; pushing; taking belongings; inappropriate text messaging and emailing; sending offensive or degrading images by phone or via the internet; gossiping; excluding people from groups and spreading hurtful and untruthful rumours."(House of Commons 2007:7-8)

This definition includes an array of behaviours and is consistent with views from children and young people, research in the field, definitions from the Anti-Bullying Alliance and Ofsted (House of Commons, 2007). Moreover this definition incorporates cyber-bullying as an extension of traditional bullying as through technology, the repetition, power imbalance and intention associated with traditional bullying takes place.

2.3 What is cyber-bullying?

The use of online technology is exploding worldwide and is fast becoming a preferred method of interacting among young people (Gross, 2004; Jackson et al. 2006; Hinduja and Patchin, 2009; Shariff, 2009):

> "At its best, the internet is a democratising, rewarding and illuminating experience for our young people; an experience that they embrace with curiosity, vigour and expertise."
> (Cross et al. 2009:11).

While most online interactions are neutral or positive, the internet provides a new means through which young people are bullied. A recent study discovered cyber-bullying to be a serious problem and some participants felt that it was more serious than 'traditional' bullying due to the associated anonymity (Mishna et al 2009). This supports the work of Betts (2008) and Cowie and Jennifer (2008) who found the impact of cyber-bullying was worse than traditional bullying. Such serious impact was due to the secretive nature of the incident, the invasion of personal space and the fact that potentially harmful messages can be sent to large groups in a short time. On the other hand Directgov (2009) assert that cyber-bullying is *just* as harmful as traditional forms of bullying and thus not 'more harmful'. Cyber-bullying has been described as:

> "…an aggressive intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who can not easily defend him or herself." (Smith et al. 2008: 376)

This description of cyber-bullying shows that communication technology tools and media are being used to engage in online bullying, and like traditional bullying it is intentional, deliberate and exclusionary (Shariff, 2009).

2.4 Cyber-bullying and young people

Young people have suggested that cyber-bullying is one of the main challenges they face in the digital world (Cross et al. 2009). A survey by the charity Beatbullying (Cross et al. 2009) found that nearly one third of all 11-16 year olds have been bullied online, and for 25% of those the bullying was ongoing. It has been argued however, that not all young people who engage in cyber-bullying are aware of what they are contributing to: "…*what is perceived as a joke or idle remark by the perpetrator may be taken extremely seriously by the target*" (Cross et al. 2009:17). The House of Commons (2007) report shows that it is possible that some behaviour regarded as bullying might not be viewed in this way by those involved. This finding is similar to that of Boulton and Flemington (1996) who studied the effects of a single viewing of an anti-bullying video on secondary school pupils' views of and involvement in bullying. Overall they found little effect measured on questionnaire data gathered before and after viewing the video. The authors found that after watching the video more

pupils revealed that they would now include "*name-calling, telling nasty stories and forcing people to do things they don't want to do*" (Boulton and Flemington, 1996:341) in their definition, than prior to this viewing. The authors conclude that this finding could be very valuable, as it is only when young people realise this behaviour is bullying that they can abstain from acting in this way (Boulton and Flemington, 1996). The same inference can be drawn in relation to cyber-bullying and disseminating pictures/texts. Betts (2008) proposes that in relation to the school anti-bullying policy it must be made clear that any young person who engages in disseminating offensive material is engaging in cyber-bullying.

2.5 What makes cyber-bullying different?

Recent attention has focused on understanding cyber-risks and the potential for abuse because young people are spending more time online than ever before (Mishna et al. 2009; Shariff, 2009). Few empirical studies, however, have been carried out in the UK investigating the phenomenon of cyber-bullying (Cowie and Jennnifer, 2008). The differences between cyber and traditional bullying though are well documented:

- Cyber-bullying can be anonymous,
- It can have a rapid effect as comments/videos etc are sent around the world in minutes and
- It is a form of bullying that victims cannot easily escape from.

2.5.1 Its anonymous

Cyber-bullying remains more anonymous than traditional bullying (Steffgen and Konig, 2009). It allows young people the opportunity to engage in behaviour with their peers that they would not usually engage with 'offline' under the protection of a user-name (Cross et al. 2009; Betts 2009; Coyne et al. 2009) Those who are not physically big enough to engage in physical bullying in school or elsewhere or popular enough to engage in verbal or relational bullying can now do so online without fear of reprisal (Hobbs, 2009). Anonymity is enhanced by the ineffective formal and informal mechanisms in place especially around phone and email chat (Coyne et al. 2009). As cyber-bullying is more secretive than traditional bullying, perpetrators are not always aware of the immediate affects their behaviour has on the victim. As a result cyber-

bullies might experience less empathy than those who bully in the traditional sense (Steffgen and Konig, 2009).

2.5.2 Its rapid

Shariff (2009) shows that young people subjected to verbal abuse at school can have this abuse supported by a number of spectators and bystanders. When this verbal abuse follows the young person into cyber-space in the rapid way it does, it continues at home. Not only are young people then victims of bullying in what should be perceived to be a safe environment (Mishna et al. 2009), but its rapid arrival into cyber-space means that an infinite number of supporters can join in the bullying. Many of these supporters would not normally engage in the abuse face-to-face and might not understand the impact it can have on the victim while they hide behind their computer screens (Cross et al. 2009).

2.5.3 Victims cannot escape

Due to its secretive nature, cyber-bullying can occur at any time and victims, it could be argued, cannot escape from it. Cross et al. (2009) consider that if young people are not online they cannot be subjected to cyber-bullying and argue that young people with limited access to the internet and/or less experience of usage are in fact more vulnerable. For young people using social media, there is a sense of permanence about the cyber-bullying. Although nasty texts and emails can be erased, mobile phones for example are generally carried everywhere by young people thus making it more difficult to escape (Shariff, 2009).

2.6 Prevalence of cyber-bullying and the characteristics of perpetrators and victims

Research on bullying to date has mostly concentrated on how children would react if they were a victim (Camodeca and Goosens, 2005). However, not all children are victims, some are bullies, some are bystanders and some are uninvolved (Olweus, 1995). In relation to the perpetrators of bullying, the research remains quite limited. However, what it does indicate is a link to depression and suicidal thinking, which if not acted upon quickly can lead to violence as adults in both the home and the workplace (House of Commons,

2007). Those involved in bullying as both perpetrators and victims form the bully/victim category and are especially prone to mental health problems (Rigby, 2003). These qualities have become the focus of considerable debate (Rigby, 2003).

All too often victims of bullying are afraid to come forward and report the incident, leading to a series of potential negative effects. Following widespread concern about these negative effects in relation to students' academic attainment and emotional well-being, bullying has become a key public policy issue in recent decades (Alexander et al. 2004). Many young people who engage in cyber-bullying, whether perpetrating it, or supporting it, are unaware of the emotional and psychological consequences associated with it. Cross et al. (2009) discuss the media reports highlighting stories of young people committing suicide following "…*relentless hate campaigns waged on Bebo and Facebook*" (p.9). They also consider the academic research which is beginning to show how victims of cyber-bullying become isolated, have poor educational attainment and engage in self destructive behaviour (Cross et al. 2009).

The next section will detail the process we followed throughout the project including the methods used and how PEAR contributed throughout the life of the study.

3. The Research Process

> The key points from the process
> - This research was unique because it was commissioned by young people and developed collaboratively between young people and adult researchers.
> - The research team was made up of PEAR members and the adult researchers at Anglia Ruskin University. They worked together to design an online questionnaire for young people and the questions for the two focus groups. They also designed a questionnaire which was sent to schools and colleges.
> - The research team analysed the data and presented the findings at the PEAR research conference.

3.1 How the research was done

We used participatory research with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Participatory research is a process of enquiry where those normally studied become actively involved in the research process. In this study the young people who commissioned the project became actively involved in all aspects of the study.

This research is quite rare because it was commissioned by young people and developed collaboratively between young people and adult researchers. Usually it is the adult researchers who decide the research agenda, in this case the young people made this decision. The young people decided the topic for investigation, helped write the project specification and short listed the proposals. The young people also decided the questions for possible candidates and contributed to the decision to commission Anglia Ruskin University to carry out the research work.

This was a new approach for the researchers at Anglia Ruskin University who had to convince a group of young people that they were the best candidates for this job. The participation of the PEAR group members to the research was a

fundamental element of the project. The ethos adopted was that young people fully participated wherever and whenever they could and if their own agenda was met together with the criteria of the project then we felt 'participation' had been achieved.

A favourable ethical opinion was gained from Anglia Ruskin University's Ethics Committee.

3.2 The methods we used.

PEAR membership spanned the two cities of London and Leeds and it was important to give all PEAR members the opportunity to participate. We attended PEAR meetings in both cities in order to make decisions about the project. The research team, made up of PEAR members and the adult reseachers, decided to use an online questionnaire for this national study as it was felt that more young people could be reached in this way. The team also decided that it would be beneficial to speak to some young people face-to-face after we had analysed the questionnaire data to tease out some of the issues. Two focus groups were run for this purpose.

3.2.1 The online questionnaire

The online questionnaire was designed collaboratively by the research team over 2 months from February-April 2010. We had 4 meetings (two in London and two in Leeds) and then remained in contact through email. The email contact meant that the questionnaire was formatted by the adult researchers and then checked and verified by the young people. No part of the project progressed until the decision had been made by the whole team; so for example, if the adult researchers felt the need to add an additional question to the questionnaire this was sent to the young people for comment. If the young people chose not to comment this was taken as agreement and we progressed.

Once we had agreed on the questionnaire content we launched it on Survey Monkey and it remained open from 12th April 2010 – 28th May 2010 (7 weeks) (Appendix 1).

The online questionnaire was aimed at all young people aged 12-18 in England. In order to target as wide an audience as possible the link for the survey was placed on the PEAR website which is accessed by young people. We also sent out fliers and advertisements to local and national youth groups. The adult researchers at the university promoted it among social work and nursing students who work with young people and the PEAR members promoted it among their friends, schools and youth groups.

3.2.2 The schools questionnaire

The research team also felt it was important to ascertain the views of staff in secondary schools and find out what they were doing about cyber-bullying and young people's mental health. As a result, a random selection of 60 secondary schools in 2 urban and 1 rural area in England were asked to participate in the research via a paper questionnaire. They were also provided with a web-link to the survey if they preferred to participate in this way.

3.2.3 Analysis

In July 2010 PEAR had a residential weekend where members of the London and Leeds groups came together to work on this and other projects. At this residential we spent time analysing the data from the questionnaire. We began with the quantitative data and Niamh (one of the adult researchers) took along a sample of some of the graphs generated through Survey Monkey. The young people divided themselves into two groups and were asked to look at these graphs and consider 3 questions:

- What is the graph telling us?
- What is it not telling us?
- Do you find anything interesting about it?

For example, box 1 shows how the 2 groups made sense of the quantitative data related to the following question: **In your opinion why might some bullies choose cyber-bullying instead of other methods? (Please tick all that apply).**

Box 1: Quantitative data

<div style="border: 2px solid blue; padding: 10px;">

What is this graph telling us?

Group 1 "*the number of each reply and the total number of replies*"

Group 2 "*nature of cyber-bullying is quite private…*" "*highlights that they think they won't get caught….sneaky*".

What is it not telling us?

Group 1: "What is the 'something else' and any combination of answers".

Group 2: *"What are the other reasons people gave?* (something else), we *won't get the qualitative data from the graph!"*

Do you find anything interesting about it?

Group 1: "*Proportion of replies, the dominance of 'they think they won't get caught'"*

Group 2: "*cyber-bullying comes across as secretive, harder to deal with as it's less obvious and people can't see it as much*".

</div>

We then discussed the qualitative data gained from the 'tell us more' questions. Framework Analysis was used to organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. Niamh provided some of the quotes from respondents which were already categorised into themes (PEAR did not see how this data had been themed). These themes were placed on cards and put in a row (in no particular order) on the floor. Niamh then mixed up all the quotes and asked PEAR members to match the comments to whatever theme they felt it suited. PEAR members had the option to develop their own themes if they felt the ones provided did not fit the data. Once this was done we compared PEAR's matches with Niamh's. It was very interesting to find that we had some similar ideas but also some very different ones.

In order to give PEAR members the opportunity to devise their own themes Niamh provided additional quotes. These quotes had been assigned to a different theme than the ones we had previously worked on and PEAR were not informed of this new theme. They were asked to work together with these new quotes to devise their own themes, but they actually felt this new data fitted the themes identified and arranged the data accordingly. As no new themes

emerged from this exercise it was clear that the adults and young people thought similarly about what the data meant.

3.2.4 The Focus Groups

At the residential in July we made decisions about the focus groups and how they would run. The young people received training on focus groups and we worked together to devise the topic guide (Appendix 2). Following this meeting the young people were made fully aware of how they could be involved in running the focus groups; including facilitating, note-taking, supporting other young people and finalising the topic guide. Due to other commitments, however, young people were unable to be involved in this part of the project. Two focus groups were run by Niamh in August and September 2010.

Across the months of August and September, young people were asked to comment on various aspects of the project including the focus group topic guide and the analysis process. This involved sending data to them for analysis and comment and supporting them to do this.

Two PEAR members in particular were very interested in the analysis part of the project. Prior to the analysis training in July, one young person emailed Niamh and asked to see some qualitative and quantitative data. He spent a lot of time making sense of this data and returned the finished analysis by email. At the residential he gave feedback to the rest of the PEAR members about how he analysed the data. He also told them that this is a timely activity and requires a lot of concentration.

Following the analysis training, another young person asked for some qualitative data as she wanted to apply her learning in relation to a framework analysis. It was very interesting to see yet again that a young person was arriving at the same conclusions as the adult researchers.

3.3 The dissemination

We had our final meeting in September when the adult researchers fed back to the PEAR group about the total findings. We made decisions about how the report should be presented and how we would disseminate the findings. The

PEAR group were also in the process of arranging their own research conference in order to celebrate the voice of young people in research more generally and to share their own work. It should be noted at this point that the decision to disseminate the findings of this project at the PEAR conference had already been decided by the young people prior to the work beginning so we were always working towards this deadline.

PEAR decided that they would like to disseminate the findings from this project via a role-play as they did not like the idea of PowerPoint for their presentation. It was decided that Niamh would present some key-findings through PowerPoint and then hand over to the PEAR members who would perform a role-play from a newsroom where a young person who had been cyber-bullied and a specialist in the field were being interviewed on television. This role-play focussed on the questions asked in the research and used direct quotes from the respondents in order to ensure the voice of young people were well and truly heard.

3.4 Reflections on the methods

3.4.1 The questionnaire
The web-based questionnaire proved very successful as a research tool when trying to reach a large geographical audience. Having members of the research team as members of youth clubs and schools, as well as university staff, further helped to promote the survey to young people in the target age-range. NCB also helped with this process. A pilot study was not conducted due to the time constraints of the project which in turn proved as a weakness. Anecdotal feedback from young people who had completed the questionnaire showed that it was very long. Many of the questions did not relate to cyber-bullying and how it related to young people's mental health, carrying out a pilot study might have brought these issues to light a little earlier on in the project.

3.4.2 The Focus Group
The focus groups gave us the opportunity to explore cyber-bullying and young people's mental health in more depth with young people. Having this face-to-face contact with young people as research participants validated the responses from the questionnaire. PEAR members were instrumental in

helping to design the focus group topic guide but having involvement from them in running the focus groups would have been very beneficial in order to put young people truly at the centre of this research.

3.5 How decisions were made

This project was one of true collaboration and participation between adults and young people. At various parts of the project young people alone made the decisions, at other times adults made them and for the most part decisions were made by the research team as a whole. Model 1 below shows who made the decisions

Model 1

The young people:
- The research agenda
- How data was gathered
- How findings were presented at the conference

Everyone
- The methods and questions used
- What the final report looked like

The adults
- How data was analysed
- How the report was formatted,
- Where the focus groups ran
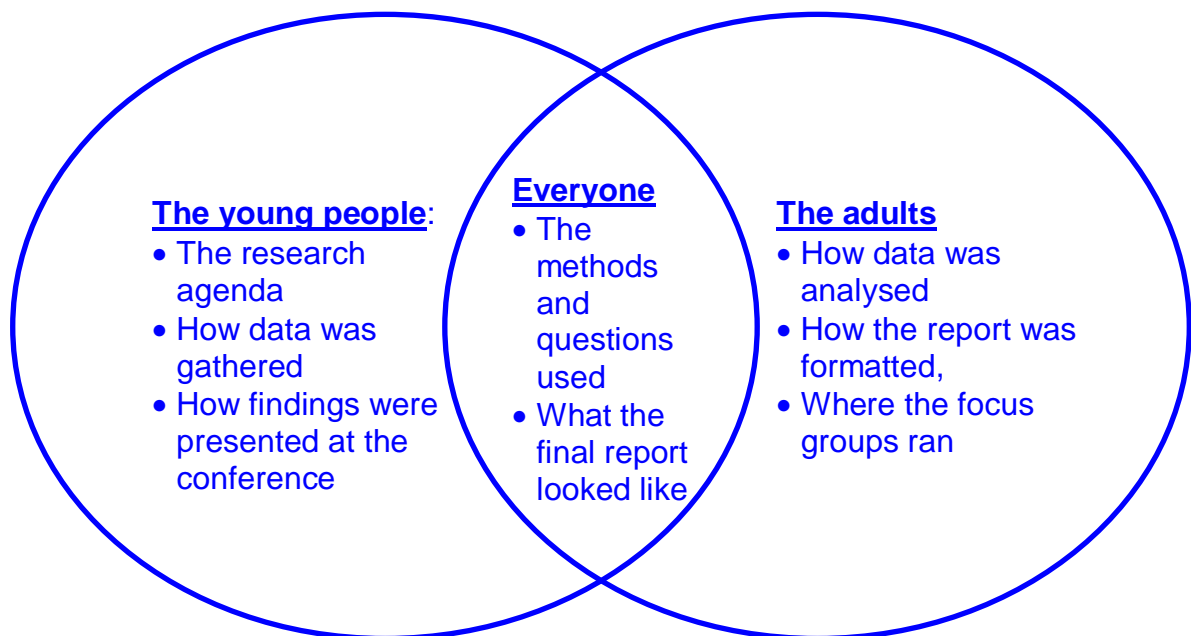
In the next chapter the findings from the online questionnaire and the 2 focus groups are presented using direct quotes from the young participants to ensure the voices of the young people remained as paramount to the project.

4. Findings[3] – the young people

The key findings

- More than twice the number of 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.
- A quarter of those who had been cyber-bullied (28.8%, n23) stayed away from school and over a third (38.9%, n31) stopped socialising outside school.
- Of those who had been cyber-bullied, over half had sought support mainly from parents and friends.
- Most of the young people thought that cyber-bullying is as harmful as traditional bullying but some feel it does not exist and is down to the victims ability to cope with it.
- The most cited reason given for why bullies choose this method is that 'they think they will not get caught'.

This chapter presents a brief review of the findings in relation to each of the questions in the on-line questionnaire pulling out specific data in relation to those who have experienced cyber-bullying and any differences between boys and girls. Data from the focus groups are included where relevant.

A web-based questionnaire was completed by 499 young people in England aged 11-19 years. Twenty-six responses were discarded as incomplete leaving the response as 473 young people. Seventeen young people took part in the focus groups aged 10-17 years. **The total number of young people participating in the research was 490.**

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[3] All quotes from respondents to the questionnaire are lifted directly from the questionnaire and have not been corrected for grammar and spelling. FG after a quote stands for Focus Group.

4.1 Demographic data[4]

Girls represented 58.6% (n287) of the total participants in the study while boys made up 41.4% (n203).

Graph 1

Ages of all young people in the research

3 (0.6%)
13 (2.7%)
1 (0.2%)
36 (7.3%)
50 (10.2%)
39 (8.0%)
25 (5.1%)
45 (9.2%)
170 (34.7%)
108 (22.0%)

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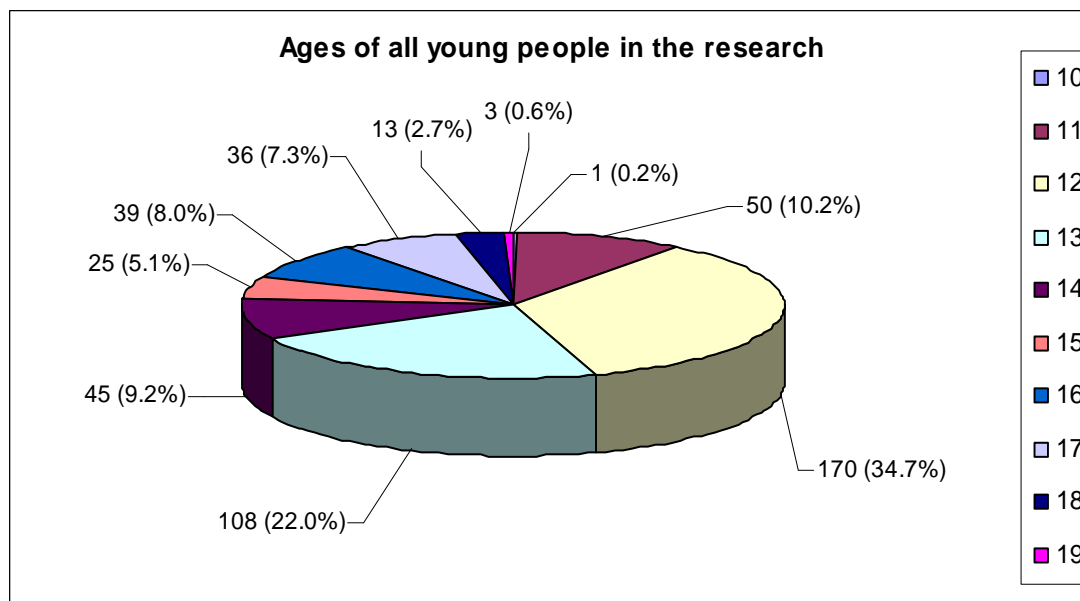
The majority of the participants were White British (54.1%, n265). The remaining were either Asian/Asian British, Black or Black British, Mixed - White and Black and White Other. The vast majority lived with their parents (98.3%, n451) and attended state secondary schools (86.7%, n410).

4.2 Please tell us what you think cyber-bullying is

The act of cyber-bullying was deemed to have a number of features: (see Appendix 3 for more detail).

1. The medium of communication - Many young people felt that cyber-bullying consists of traditional bullying methods such as '*harassment'*, '*antagonising'*, '*tormenting'*, '*threatening'* via different forms of technology. Some even regarded the "*physical distance between the victim and the bully*" to be important aspects of the cyber-bullying episode.

2. The behaviour - Some young people considered the features of this behaviour to be '*secretive', 'repetitious'*, and creating '*fear'*.

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[4] **Note**: Not every young person answered every question so the n values for some questions are different from others.

3. The impact - This impact varied for young people and included the feelings of the victim, the intention involved with cyber-bullying to target vulnerable young people, excluding young people and intentionally sharing hurtful information about others via social media.

4. The blame on the victim - A minority of young people felt that cyber-bullying was just '*nonsense'* and one young person felt it didn't exist.

4.3 Use of social media

Graph 2 shows the type of social media used by young people in the questionnaire.

Graph 2
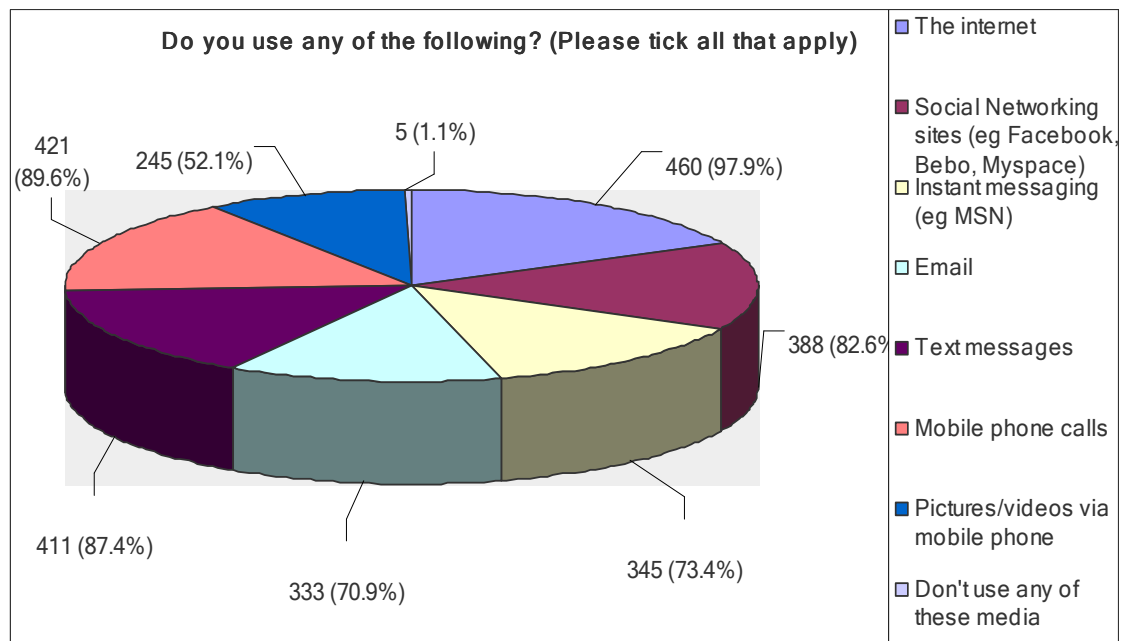
The types of social media used by boys and girls in this study were similar though girls used both email and text messaging more than boys. Over 92% (boys and girls) said they used the different types of media 'at home'. For the most part, young people admitted they used various types of social media 'more than twice a day' and email 'once' or 'twice a day'.

4.4 Experiences of cyber-bullying

We asked young people to tell us about any role they have played in the cyber-bullying experience (see graph 3).

Graph 3:

Role in cyber-bullying episode

Legend:
- Been cyber-bullied?
- Cyber-bullied others
- Witnessed cyber bullying
- Known somebody who has been cyber-bullied
- Known somebody who has cyber-bullied others
- Don't know
- I have not experienced any of the above

Pie chart values: 29 (6.6%), 116 (26.3%), 196 (44.4%), 87 (19.7%), 166 (37.6%), 62 (14.1)%, 112 (25.4%)
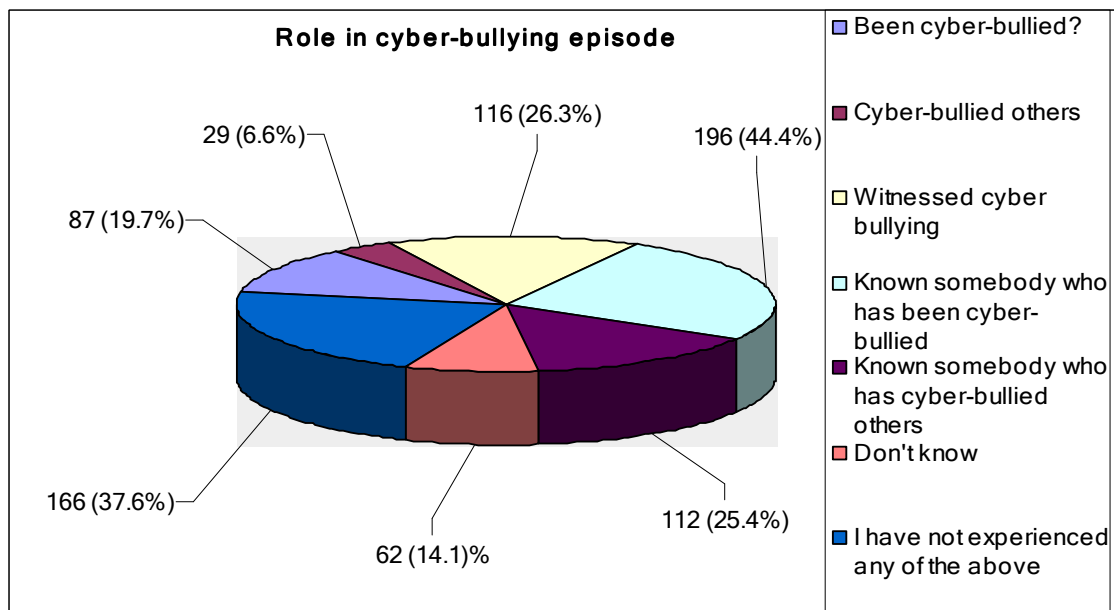
Differences between boys and girls were noted:

- 19.7% (n87) of the respondents had been cyber-bullied and of these more were girls (60 girls, 27 boys).

- More girls had 'witnessed cyber-bullying' (30.5%, n79 girls; 20.3%, n37 boys) 'known somebody who has been cyber-bullied' (54.4%, n141 girls; 30.2%, n55 boys) and 'known somebody who has cyber-bullied others' (32.8%, n85 girls; 14.8%, n27 boys).

- Nearly half of all boys (48.4%, n88) have not experienced any form of cyber-bullying compared to less than one third of girls (30.1%, n78).

- More than twice the number of girls than boys said they had experienced cyber-bullying in some way (56.4% girls, n154; 36% boys, n72)

> *"I was cyber-bullyed on Facebook, because someone put several hurtful comments in response to my status updates and profile pictures. This actually was extended into school by the bully, but at this stage the bullying was eliminated. For these personal reasons I believe Facebook should be installed with a panic button" (Boy).*

> *"I have known somebody who found it funny to pretend to be somebody else and make fun of people online, whether it upsetted the victim or not, I am unsure." (Girl)*

Of those that had been cyber-bullied (19.7%, n87), nearly a third experienced cyber-bullying via social networking sites with text messaging being the next

most frequent medium and more than a third knew somebody who had been cyber-bullied. Of these 87, 18.4% (n16) had cyber-bullied others. This point was also raised in the focus groups as a reason why some young people choose cyber-bullying over other methods.

> *".....it's probably because they got bullied theirself" (Girl, FG2)*

> *"...... but like they're experiencing some kind of bullying that made them like bully ...... They've got to be told that that's wrong more gently because if they go through something really bad and that makes them bully then......... (Girl, FG1)*

Graph 4 shows the form the cyber-bullying took and there were no significant gender differences.

Graph 4
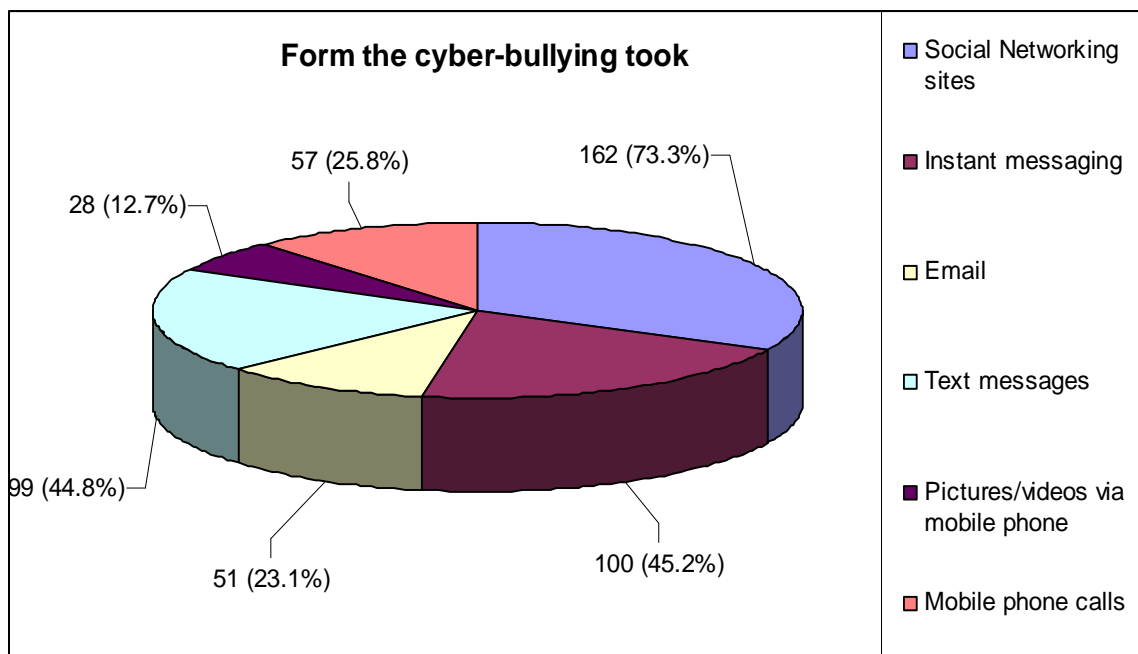
4.5 Effects of cyber-bullying

Those who had experienced cyber-bullying in some way (36% boys, n72 and 56.4% girls, n154) were asked what effect this experience had had on them along a continuum in relation to their confidence, their level of self-esteem, their mental and emotional well being, their attendance at school and their use of social media. The most common answer for all aspects was 'not at all'. However, of those who said they had been affected the most common effect was to their confidence, self-esteem and mental and emotional well-being. Few

felt they had been affected 'a lot' or 'very' much in relation to all five effects (see Appendix 4 for detailed review of this data).

More girls (20%, n31) than boys (7%, n5) provided additional detail about how the experience had affected them.

> "it did not affet me i used my mum's tactic and just said "yeah whatever" (Boy)

> "I developed anorexia nervosa. Although not the single cause of my illness, bullying greatly contributed to my low self-esteem which led to becoming ill" (Girl)

Further analysis of the data was carried out for those who had been cyber-bullied (Appendix 4). Of these 87, 36.6% (n30) said it had affected their confidence from 'quite a lot (13.4%, n11) to 'very' (13.4%, n11), whilst 32.9% (n27) said it had not affected their confidence at all. Figures were similar for self-esteem. Finally, with regards to mental and emotional well-being 51.9% (n41) said cyber-bullying had affected them but for most (21.5%, n17) this was only 'a little'. Only a small number, 12.7% (n10), felt 'very' affected by the cyber-bullying episode. However a quarter of those who had been cyber-bullied (28.8%, n23) stayed away from school and over a third (38.9%, n31) stopped socialising outside school.

When comparing those who had been cyber-bullied with the rest of the research participants, it is worth noting that those who had been cyber-bullied were more affected overall specifically in relation to 'confidence' and 'self-esteem'.

4.6 If you worry about or have been affected by cyber-bullying what have you done to make yourself safe?
Graph 5

If you worry about or have been affected by cyber-bullying what have you done to make yourself safe? (please tick all that apply)

- Change my Instant Messenger address
- Change my email address
- Stopped using social network sites
- Changed my mobile number
- Use social media less
- I don't worry about cyber-bullying
- Something else

92 (22.8%) · 89 (22.1) · 90 (22.3%) · 42 (10.4%) · 87 (21.6%) · 46 (11.4%) · 221 (54.8%)
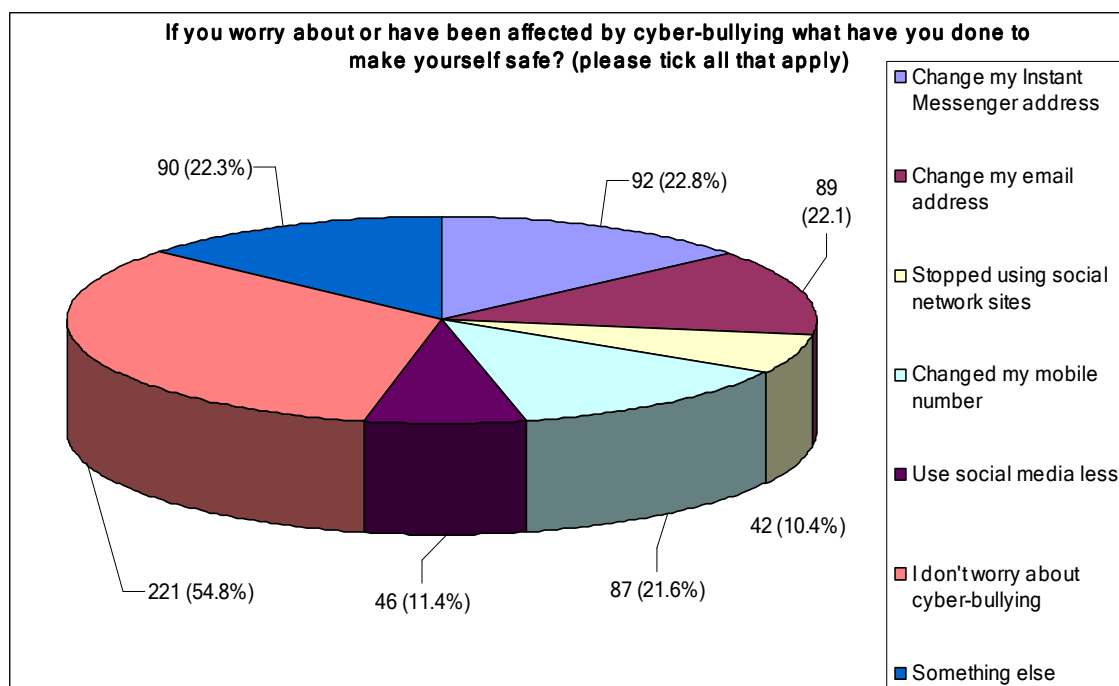
The majority of respondents did not worry about cyber-bullying. There were no fundamental differences between the 2 gender groups although boys were slightly less likely (61.9%, n99) than girls (50.2%, n122) to worry about cyber-bullying. This was also found in the focus groups where the boys felt that boys do not engage in cyber-bullying to the same extent as girls:

> **Boy 1**: *"They do face to face - guys most of the time and do fighting and all that. That's what most boys do"?*
> **Researcher:** *"Would you both agree with X"?*
> **Boy 2:** *"Yeah well like me if someone says a bad comment about me I will say something back but if I did not like that comment I would remove them and block them."*

Of the 87 who had experienced cyber-bullying, 35 of them (41.7%) did not worry about it.

The young people in the study described a number of actions they would take to stay safe from cyber-bullying (these were the same for all young people regardless of whether they had been cyber-bullied or not) and they included:

Blocking a person's number/email address:

> *"Blocked the person responsible." (Boy)*

> *"Block them, you can block people on Facebook" (Girl, FG2)*

Not giving out personal details to those they don't know

> *"More careful about what I say and who I say it to online. Also about how public I make things." (Girl)*

> *"i do not accept friend requests on facebook of people i do not know and when my msn gets added on somone elses msn i do not accept that either." (Boy)*

Reporting the incident to an adult

> *"Press print screen, copy it onto a word document and then print it out. Give it to a teacher who can then take it further. Any other way; the abuse could still be there, when you do decide to go back onto the social networking sites etc" (Girl)*

> *"tell your parents, tell your teacher and tell the police" (Boy)*

4.7 If you are worried about or have been affected by cyber-bullying have you sought emotional/practical support?

Just under half of young people said yes they had. There was no difference between answers from boys and girls. Reasons given for not seeking support included:

Fear of making the bullying worse

> *"I just didn't want to make it worse" (Girl)*

> *"because the bullies will keep on herting me and call me" (Boy)*

Being able to deal with the incident themselves

> *"its embarrassing and not necessary, my friends help me through it, adults never seem to understand" (Girl)*

> *"becuase it was minor so i just took it on the chin and got on with what i was doing and just didnt talk to them and evetualy deleted them as freinds." (Boy)*

4.8 If you received support who did you receive it from?

Slight differences were apparent in relation to who boys and girls received support from as graph 6 highlights:

Graph 6:
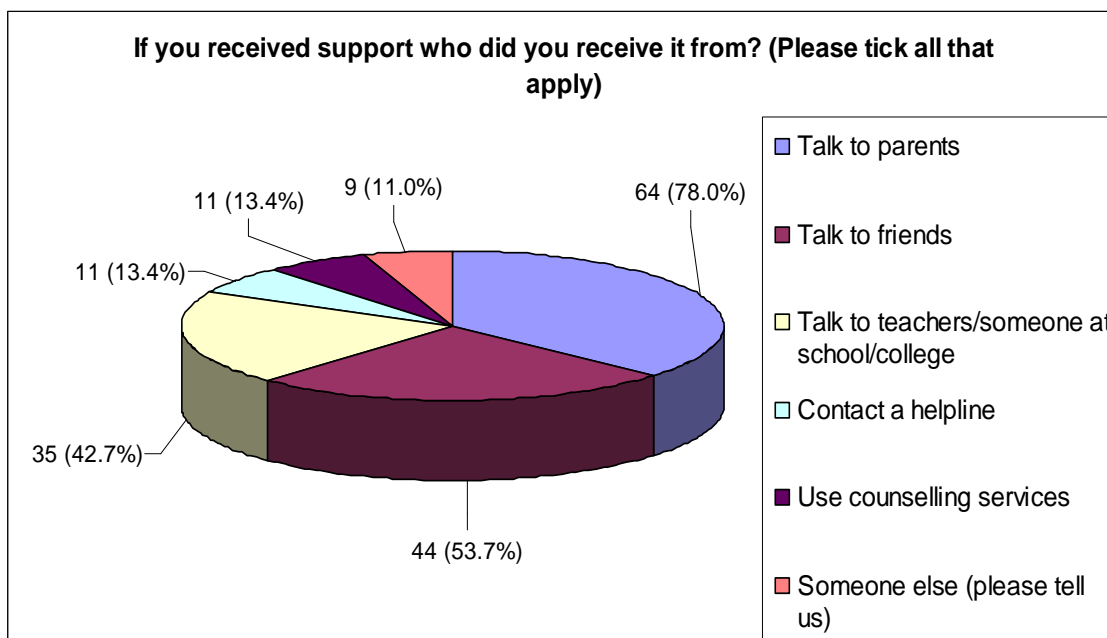
The 'someone else' category included "*the people who own the site*" and various family members such as '*my cousin*' and '*sibling*'. Of those who had been cyber-bullied, over half had sought support mainly from parents and friends; 41.4% (n12) admitted to talking to someone at school whilst just under half had chosen not to seek support (43.1%, n22).

4.9 If you received support how useful was it?

Table 3

Support	Boys	Girls
Not very helpful	15.4% (n=4)	1.9% (n=1)
A little helpful	11.5% (n=3)	15.4%(n=8)
Quite helpful	38.5% (n=10)	36.5% (n=19)
Very helpful	34.6% (n=9)	46.2% (n=24)

Some of the young people gave more information about the support they received.

> "*I was involved in 'talking therapy' with a counsellor at my school. They were unable to find out who the bully was.*"
> *(Girl)*

> *"i have my dad on facebook and he saw what had happend because it was on my facebook page and he told my mum and they both gave me support"* (Girl)

> *"Because They Will Get There Mates To Do It To U"* (Boy)

Of the 29 young people who had been cyber-bullied and sought support, almost all found the support to be helpful in some way (98.1%, n27).

4.10 Cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying such as physical, verbal, emotional and psychological bullying. Do you agree?

Most of the young people, including those who had been cyber-bullied, agreed (74.4%, n322). The rest (25.6%, n111) either disagreed with the statement or were unsure. Those who agreed with the statement identified the psychological and emotional impact all forms of bullying have on those in receipt of it:

> *"I think if it causes a reaction from another person, that causes embarrassment or intimidation or anything like that, then it's bullying"* (Girl, FG2).

> *"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)

> *"Just because it isn't in real life doesn't mean the emotional distress caused is any less"* (Boy)

Some suggested that cyber-bullying could be worse because the bullying is in black and white, could get very personal, has the potential to involve many more people much more quickly and has a degree of secrecy about it which in turn can create fear in the victim:

> *"If anything it is just as bad mental cruelty can be even worse than physical because there are no physical scars"* (Girl)

> *"I think it could be worse, because lots of other people can get involved, whereas when it's physical bullying it's normally just between one or two or a smaller group, things could escalate too because especially Facebook, they've got potential to escalate."* (Girl, FG2)

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

"The effects are the same and often the bullying can be worse as the perpetrator is unknown or can disguise their identity. Away from the eyes of teachers etc, more can be done without anyone knowing." (Girl)

"It hurts people feelings and can even lead to committing soucide, so that is even worse than physical and physical bullying is also very bad." (Girl)

For some, cyber-bullying has been viewed as an extension of traditional bullying or as a lead up to it:

"Cyber-bullying is Just as Harmful as Other Forms of Bullying Because if You Tell Someone Your Name And Your Address Then it Might Lead to You Meeting up With Them And You Could Get Very Hurt" (Boy)

"…when there's an argument it can continue when you're not at school or whatever and they can continue it over Facebook and everyone can see it then other people get involved." (Girl, FG2).

Young people who disagreed with this statement felt that cyber-bullying is not physical, cannot hurt the victim and so is less harmful. They also felt that for some victims, it was '*their own fault*' for allowing themselves to be upset by these messages and not just deleting them or reporting them to the '*moderator of that site*'.

"You choose to be cyber-bullied by letting the words of the person bullying you affect you so any one who has been cyber-bullied it's their fault they are letting the words get to them and then killing themselves and I think that is downright stupid." (Girl)

Some young people felt that cyber-bullying is easier to escape from than traditional bullying and therefore less harmful:

"I think its not as bad because with verbal or physical, you are more likely to come in contact with your attacker regularly, and that can be disturbing. However, with cyber-bullying it is virtual so you can find ways to avoid the person." (Girl)

"well if some one says something on the pohne just turn it off but if some one is saying it to your face they might follow you." (Boy)

In both focus groups participants revealed that they would rather be cyber-bullied than physically bullied, a sentiment echoed in the views of one of the respondents who had been cyber-bullied:

> *"I suppose it's kind of like it would be better to be cyber-bullied because you would have the evidence. Whereas if someone hit you, you wouldn't always bruise and its then your word against theirs but if you have it on Facebook in black and white and a print out of it then you have something to prove they are doing that to you" (Girl, FG1)*

4.11 People who do things that can be classed as cyber-bullying often don't think that this is bullying. Do you agree?

Of the young people who answered this question, 69.1% (n297) agreed and the rest either disagreed or did not know. Of those who agreed with the statement most suggested that this was because it was not bullying in the traditional sense (i.e. not face to face and/or physical). Only girls however identified this as a reason for agreeing with the statement. Many thought that cyber-bullying was actually seen by bullies as merely a form of '*harmless fun'*, '*a joke'* and therefore not an issue. For some it was simply that the bullies just '*did not realise'* what they were doing largely due to the '*lack of immediate effect'*. However a small number clearly disagreed with the statement and were convinced that bullies *"know perfectly well that it's bullying"* and that "*if someone bullies you cyber or face to face they know damn sure what they are doing".*

4.12 Do you think cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem for you and other young people you know?

About half agreed that cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem though more boys than girls said it was not. Those who answered 'yes' (including those who had been cyber-bullied) gave a number of reasons:

Increase internet/technology usage

All felt strongly that more frequent and available access to the internet and access to mobile phones have contributed largely to cyber-bullying becoming more of a problem.

> *"Because more and more people are using social networking sites." (Girl)*
> *"Due to technology being cheaper, it is easier for young people to bully people in this way because they don't believe*

they can be tracked. They also are aware that there is no
panic button on most social networking sites." (Boy)

Concern for their peers

Young people in the study had a genuine concern for other young people who are being cyber-bullied. Many of the young people identified the potential for suicide among young people as a direct result of cyber-bullying and also how it affects young people's performance at school:

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

> *"I know plenty of people now who have injured themselves*
> *due to the texts they recieved, it was never like this before!!!"*
> *(Girl)*

> *"i think young people are more affected and therefore there*
> *edducation is affected and then affects there adult life" (Boy)*

Young people in both the survey and focus groups acknowledged how cyber-bullying has affected self-esteem:

> *"because more and more people are losing their self-*
> *esstem" (Girl)*

> *"I do, because it can lower their self esteem and their*
> *encouragement to do more stuff." (Girl, FG 2).*

There was general consensus in the focus groups that cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem for young people due its <u>secretive and easier</u> nature:

> *"You're behind a screen also you're not face-to-face with the*
> *person so it's so much easier to say things to them. I've*
> *known people who've done it. I've not done it though!" (Girl,*
> *FG1)*

> *"…because people don't have to face them over a computer*
> *so it's so much easier. It's so much quicker as well cos on*
> *something like Facebook its not just you, you can get*
> *everyone on Facebook to help you bully that person." (Girl,*
> *FG1)*

Additionally this form of bullying which takes place in the 'virtual' world can be an extension of a bullying incident in the 'real' world and thus young people cannot escape it:

> *"….when there's an argument it can continue when you're not at school or whatever and they can continue it over Facebook and everyone can see it then other people get involved." (Girl, FG2)*

Another theme identified by the focus group participants was the fact that cyber-bullying might not be intentional by the bully and it is this intention, combined with the perception of the victim that makes the episode a bullying episode:

> *"Some people they don't want to sound cruel but because maybe if you don't put a smiley face on it, it might seem cruel when sometimes you don't mean it." (Girl, FG1)*

> *"The thing with that is on Facebook you can see who's commented on that whereas on Formspring you couldn't and I think that's why Formspring is really bad cos people get really personal with it as well and do actually go really deep." (Girl, FG1)*

Those who disagreed with the statement felt that as cyber-bullying had not affected them or their friends it was not a growing concern:

> *"no because none of my mates are getting cyber-bullied and im not." (Boy)*

> *"But to an extent. I personally don't know anyone who has experienced any form of cyber-bullying but I would not be surprised if the statistics for this across the UK was high due to the things we hear around us. For example, people who 'stalk' others on facebook/msn - I believe this to be a form of cyber-bullying." (Girl)*

A further issue raised by girls was that young people can ignore this bullying and thus not see it as a problem:

> *"cos you can just block people or delete them or tell someone. or send them stuff back.." (Girl)*

4.13 In your opinion, why might some bullies choose cyber-bullying instead of other methods?
Graph 7

In your opinion why might some bullies choose cyber-bullying instead of other methods? (please tick all that apply)

- They think they won't get caught — 336 (78.9%)
- Schools/colleges don't deal with cyber-bullying very well — 145 (34.0%)
- They can bully others less obviously — 216 (50.7%)
- They think this is more effective/public — 116 (27.2%)
- The victim can't escape from it — 188 (44.1%)
- Something else (please tell us) — 86 (20.2%)

Slightly more girls than boys believe bullies choose cyber-bullying because 'they can bully others less obviously' and 'the victim can't escape from it'. The most cited reason given, by both genders, is because 'they think they will not get caught'. Other reasons were suggested and include:

Cowardice

> "It's a very easy method. The internet and phones are widely and readily available to be exploited in this way. Also, as everyone says, 'bullies are cowards'. Relying on cybermethods to abuse someone just highlights this fact and I'd say that the reason it's fast becoming so popular is for that reason - they can hide behind their phone or PC screen and not have to deal with their victim face-to-face." (Girl)

> "Because they are too scared to do it to somebody's face im not saying that is right either but they would rather do it online thinking there safer but they are not because on Facebook if domebody says something rude or something nasty on the comment underneath there is a blue little button saying report this." (Boy)

Many respondents explained that the bullies would be *"too scared to bully face to face"*. Some said that in fact this type of bullying could actually instil "*more confidence"* in the bullies making them feel and "*act tough".*

Another reason given was that this form of bullying is much 'easier' to do. It can be done "*anywhere and at anytime*" making use of mobile phones, or in the "*comfort of your own home*".

Linked to the ease of cyber-bullying is the fact that it is 'secretive' as the bully can remain "*anonymous*" by "*hiding their identity*" and therefore do not have to deal with the reactions of the victims, they "*avoid confrontation*" and there are "*no punishments*".

4.14 Awareness of cyber-bullying

The young people were asked whether they thought their school/college was aware that cyber-bullying went on; 64.9% (n275) felt their school/college was aware while 9.4% (n40) said they did not know. The majority said that their schools were proactive in dealing with incidences as they arose:

> *"my college runs its own anti-cyber-bullying commitee which is linked to cybermentors" (Girl)*

> *"my school has had assembleys about cyber-bullying and ways you can stop it or you can report it anoiymosly on somthing we have called the sharp system... if you report a problem on the sharp system it goes direcly to the school policeman or the deputy head, you can write your name or you cant, its all up to YOU" (Boy).*

Some felt their schools/colleges were not aware of cyber-bullying incidents and turned a blind eye to it:

> *"my school hide and say that bullying doesnt go on cos they dont wanna look bad for ofsted" (Boy)*

> *"My school is oblivious to anything that happens, many things against school rules happen beneath there eyes but they either refuse to aknowledge it or are just not paying attention so we must suffer" (Girl)*

Those who felt their schools/colleges did enough thought they were proactive in responding to cyber-bullying incidents and educating the students:

> *"My school are very good and take good care and the people around are nice but there are the few odd idiots, but come on there is idiots evrywhere." (Boy, 19)*

> *"My school has a Peer Support system in place whereby students can speak to any of these members who will address any issue in a confidential and professional manner. I've not heard of cyber-bullying taking place, but not being on this system or having used it myself, I can't say for sure."* (Girl, 17)

Those who were unsure or disagreed mainly felt that the current anti-bullying policies were ineffective or did not work:

> *"If cyber-bullying is brought to our schools attention, usually, they expect printed proof of the situation and will take it into their own hand depending on its seriousness. However this is usually a couple of detentions. And its just not enough."* (Girl, 32)

> *"they warn us off it but they dont take any action"* (Boy, 24)

A large number of girls felt that schools/colleges should not be involved in dealing with incidents of cyber-bullying especially if this went on outside school/college:

> *"They don't do anything specifically to do with cyber-bullying, but to be honest there's not much they can do. They shouldn't get involved with our out-of-school life, it's none of their buisness and they need to recognise we have lives of our own. Our school will not always be there to put someone into detention if they've said something nasty about us, schools need to back off and let us sort things out for ourselves. Sometimes they forget that their purpose is to educate us in academic subjects, not to dictate the course of our lives. If we weren't so overprotected from age we'd be much more capable of looking after ourselves, which in the end is most important."* (Girl,15).

4.15 Do you think your parents/carers are aware that cyber-bullying goes on?

When asked if they thought their parents were aware that cyber-bullying goes on, 64.4% (n273) responded 'yes';

> *" to a certain extent most parents are aware that there can be unpleasant things being said through cyber media, although this may not necessarily occur to them as an issue unless it came up in context or conversation"* (Girl).

When asked to give ideas of what could be done to make parents more aware, the most frequently cited suggestion was for giving out <u>more information</u>, firstly via the media through television, leaflet drops, on news bulletins and secondly via schools in the form of newsletters and meetings with teachers.

Several young people made reference to the importance of <u>two way communications</u> between children and their parents. Some suggested that children should talk more to their parents about cyber-bullying, especially if it was happening to them. Others highlighted the responsibility parents had for ensuring their children were safe online and for checking "*what is actually going on*".

Only two respondents thought that nothing should be done to raise awareness among parents for fear of making parents become "*more paranoid*" and "*worried*". Both of these respondents were boys. The girls talked more about the importance of communication than did the boys.

5. Findings – the schools/ colleges

Respondents included 6 secondary schools, 3 special schools and 2 Further Education or Sixth form colleges. All were coeducational. Sixty surveys were posted out with a response rate of 28.3% (n11).

Only 2 respondents were firm in their view that cyber-bullying was not affecting young people in their school/college. We also asked **what schools do to monitor cyber-bullying**, this was answered by 9 respondents, two of whom said they do not do anything. The other seven said they check cyber-bullying through "*monitoring of internal emails*" and "*School council, Pastoral support*".

Nine respondents said they had a policy for dealing with cyber-bullying, 8 saying this was part of the school/college policy for dealing with bullying. One had a separate policy for dealing specifically with cyber-bullying and all nine schools/colleges believed their policies were effective. Eight respondents were confident that their school/college were proactive in dealing with cyber-bullying.

> *"We do yearly sessions about bullying and include cyber-bullying in this. Pupils have recently done work to enter into a competition on this subject"*

> *"Problems in our school are dealt with more or less straight away."*

Nine respondents said they provided support to students who were victims of cyber-bullying, this type of support included *"learning mentors, communication with the home, monitoring pupils affected by bullying"* and *"1 to 1 mentoring sessions"*.

Eight out of the 11 respondents revealed that they involved students in trying to combat cyber-bullying:

> *"Through curriculum + assemblies + school council"*

> *"A few students are being asked to go on a course."*

6. Conclusions

> The key points
>
> - More than double the number of girls reported having been cyber-bullied.
> - A similar proportion of the girls and boys admitted having cyber-bullied others.
> - The views of the young people in our study, that cyber-bullying might cause even more damage than traditional bullying, concur with other research.
> - Some young people implied that it does not exist and that people who think themselves bullied allow themselves to be bullied – possibly explained by the great variety in young people's perception of what cyber-bullying actually is.
> - Most of the young people in our study expressed the view that bullies choose cyber-bullying because they will not get caught.
> - More than a third of those who had been cyber-bullied felt affected by it.
> - Of those who sought support, 78% (85) sought support by talking to their parents – a finding which contradicts previous studies.

This chapter reflects on the process of involving young people in research and then draws out conclusions about the effect of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health.

6.1 Young people in research

More and more young people are becoming involved in research in different ways. In some aspects they are contributing to some parts of the research while in others they take a more active role as researchers alongside adults (Alderson, 2001: Bostock and Freeman 2003; McLaughlin 2006). In this project PEAR were involved as part of the commissioning team and so formulated the research questions and chose a team of researchers to support the project. PEAR were involved in all aspects of the project (see Chapter 3). However,

although involving young people as researchers has advantages, it can also be difficult to implement.

Many benefits were apparent in this project. Of paramount importance was the commitment to hearing the voices of young people. This involvement ensured that the right language was used in the questionnaire and focus group topic guide and so gave the research credibility among young people and adults. Additionally, the young people's decision to present the findings of this research via role-play at their conference ensured the voices of the young participants were well and truly heard. Bostock and Freeman (2003) found that when young people presented the findings of their research through drama the findings were brought to life. In our project, the young people thought very carefully about what they would include in the dissemination. They practised hard and called upon the adult researchers when they felt they needed to. As this topic area was highly sensitive for some young people, the PEAR members presented the findings in a highly sensitive manner having regard for all who participated.

Another positive aspect of this project was the process of decision-making (see Chapter 3). Historically there has been a tendency for researchers, and others, to perceive children as incompetent and incapable of understanding the research process (Christensen & Prout, 2002) or of being able to give true accounts of their experiences. The image of children as incompetent and in need of protection leads to a power imbalance between young people and adults. Views on the competency of young people are changing however, and this is challenging the power relationship in the decision making process as this project highlights. Young people were given the option to choose the extent to which they contributed to the research process. Bognar and Zovko (2009), in carrying out action research with university students conclude that this collaborative process can only be meaningful once students engage with it on their own terms and the basis of their own interest.

The specific difficulties with this project were around time, geography and communication. The research was commissioned from January – October 2010 and during this time ethical approval was needed, the data needed to be

gathered, analysed and written up. At the same time the young researchers needed to be provided with the opportunity to be meaningfully involved throughout the research process. This coupled with the geographical distance between the two groups made this task quite difficult. Although PEAR members had received previous research training, additional training was provided during meetings to ensure everyone had an equal opportunity to understand and contribute to the research. Only a few hours at a time were available for these training sessions as their meetings were never solely dedicated to the cyber-bullying research. On reflection, the time allocated for whole team meetings and training was not enough in order to ensure active participation and understanding. This is consistent with other research from Kirby (1999) and Worrall (2000) who emphasise the importance of training for young researchers to fully understand the research process and so be fully involved at each stage.

Geographical distances also meant that much of the communication for this project took place via email. Young people were given the option to reply and contribute to these emails wherever they felt this was appropriate. On reflection, given that the young people had a vast role in the commissioning process, dialogue on how involved they wanted to be in the research from the outset would have been helpful. This would have meant that all members of the research team would have been clear about who was doing what and as Coad and Evans (2008) report, would therefore have been able to make informed decisions about their involvement throughout the project. Not all members of the PEAR group wanted to be involved in this specific research project so finding out who wanted to be involved and where would have been beneficial.

Finally PEAR members chose not to be involved in the running of the focus groups which would have been beneficial. McLaughlin (2006) and O'Brien & Moules (2007) found that when young people were involved in asking the questions a unique relationship developed between the young researchers and young participants who in turn felt more comfortable to discuss the research topic with their peers as opposed to adult researchers.

6.2 Conclusions from the findings

The aim of this study was to explore the impact that cyber-bullying might have on the mental health of young people from a public health perspective. The impacts that bullying in its traditional face to face form can have on young people are well documented (Boulton and Flemington, 1996; Lines, 1999; Oliver and Candappa, 2003; Rigby, 2004; Sullivan et al. 2004) and therefore the potential for cyber-bullying to have harmful effects is also recognised. This section focuses on teasing out the potential effects of cyber-bullying on the mental health of young people. In addition, where relevant, we focus on the views of those who have experienced cyber-bullying and on any specific differences between the responses of boys and girls. Finally we look briefly at the role of schools in this phenomenon.

Fewer than half the young people in this study knew someone who had been cyber-bullied which is consistent with the findings from Li (2006). The proportion who had been cyber-bullied (19.7%) is similar to that found in other studies both in the UK and globally (National Children's Home, 2002; Blair, 2003; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004; Li 2006).

We found that double the number of girls than boys experienced cyber-bullying in some way. Double the number of girls reported having been cyber-bullied. This finding is inconsistent with that found in a previous Canadian study by Li (2006) investigating gender issues in cyber-bullying where no significant difference between the proportion of boys and girls who reported being cyber-bullied was found. Li (2006) further found that boys were more likely to cyber-bully than girls but we found no difference finding that a similar proportion of the girls and boys admitted having cyber-bullied others.

6.2 The impact of cyber-bullying on mental health

In attempting to draw out the impact that cyber-bullying has on young people's mental health we seek to provide answers to a number of questions set by PEAR as the commissioning group. These questions are:

- What are the links between cyber and other forms of bullying?
- How does cyber-bullying impact on young people's use of technology?

6.2.1 What are the links between cyber and other forms of bullying?

This relationship has been described in part by the *differences* between the two forms (Brown et al. 2006) identifying one of the unique differences as being anonymity (Mishna et al. 2009). Other features of cyber-bullying that distinguish it from other forms of bullying include the lack of visual or aural feedback from online abuse and the ease with which the bullying can be done (Willard, 2006). The young people in our study identified all these features of cyber-bullying that distinguish it from traditional bullying.

On the other hand *similarities* between the two types of bullying have been noted. For instance in a study by Mishna et al. (2009) of the perceptions of young people towards cyber-bullying, the use of spreading rumours, making threats and derogatory comments was common to both forms. Similarly, respondents in our study felt that cyber-bullying consists of traditional bullying methods such as '*harassment', 'antagonising', 'tormenting', 'threatening'* via different forms of technology. They also identified 'intentionality' as an important feature of cyber-bullying as did Dooley et al. (2009) in their theoretical and conceptual review of bullying.

We explored this relationship further by asking whether cyber-bullying is as harmful as other forms of bullying. Overwhelmingly the young people agreed that it was and in some cases that it was worse because the bullying is in black and white, could get very personal, has the potential to involve many more people much more quickly and has a degree of secrecy about it which in turn can create fear in the victim. This finding concurs with that of the young people in the study by Mishna et al. (2009) who identified cyber-bullying as having similar impacts on the victim as traditional bullying. They also recognised that it could be worse for very similar reasons. Campbell (2005:71) stresses the importance of recognising the lasting effects and the power of "the written word".

So the impact on young people of this kind of bullying may be assumed to be no less than that caused by other forms of bullying. This assumption has been confirmed by Juvonen and Gross (2008) who found that online experiences of

bullying caused elevated levels of distress much like encounters of face to face bullying. The views of the young people in our study, that cyber-bullying might cause even more damage than traditional bullying, concur with early research by Willard (2006) whose work suggests a range of consequences including low self esteem, anxiety, anger, depression, school absenteeism, poor grades, an increased tendency to violate others and to youth suicide. This impact is indeed a global phenomenon as evidenced by research in many countries including Canada (Brown et al. 2006), New Zealand (New Zealand Catholic News, 2004; cited in Brown et al. 2006) and Hungary (Gati et al. 2001; cited in Brown et al. 2006).

In exploring what it is that the young people considered as 'harm' we tease out some of the impacts on their mental health that this form of bullying might have, all of which concur with previous studies. Respondents frequently wrote about "*messing with people's heads*", causing *"upset", "depression"* and even "*sadness*" deriving from the bullies' actions. One respondent told us that "*bullying greatly contributed to my low self-esteem*" and another that "*it made me feel inferere* [inferior]". Many suggested that this form of bullying, like other forms, can "*push people over the edge*" and lead to suicide attempts and also successful suicides:

> *"…. Also because my I.C.T teacher told us a story about a girl who kept on getting horrible text messages of her 'friends' and tried to kill her self!" (Boy)*

> *"…Sometimes they bully them so hard they cause the victim to hurt or kill themselves" (Girl).*

The belief that this form of bullying might not cause any less harm than other forms of bullying is reflected in these quotes:

> *"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)*

> *"Just because it isn't in real life doesn't mean the emotional distress caused is any less" (Boy)*

It is important to note that not all our respondents agreed that cyber-bullying is more harmful than traditional bullying.

> *"But to be honest, that's always going to happen and people should man-up and deal with life. I was excluded a lot when I was younger (I don't use the word bully because I disagree with it as you may have seen) but I didn't go whining to a teacher every time someone wouldn't allow me to be in their group - although it us upsetting. That experience made me a better person today. There was a reason I was excluded and I dealt with those issues and moved on. The idea that we will deal with bullying is stupid. Its human nature. it happens every day - at school, at work and at home. People should be taught to deal with it." (Boy)*

In contrast to findings in other studies, some implied that it does not exist and that people who think themselves bullied actually allow themselves to be bullied and that young people can easily escape from the bullying by turning off their phones or blocking their accounts. Smith et al. (2008) also found this to be a view taken by some of the young people in their study. This view might be explained by the great variety in young people's perception of what cyber-bullying actually is. Vandebosch and Cleemput (2008: 501) found that for some respondents it depended on whether the 'victim' felt 'personally attacked' but the line between what was and what was not a personal attack varied and was often vague. Additionally, what some thought was an insult might be construed by others as a joke.

The relationship between traditional bullying and cyber-bullying was also approached by exploring why young people might use cyber-bullying instead of other forms. Most of the young people in our study expressed the view that bullies choose cyber-bullying because they will not get caught. This anonymity also emerged as a primary theme in the study by Mishna et al. (2009). The anonymity gives the perpetrator power to harass others without consequences and can also intensify the fear generated in the victim. There is, however, some debate over whether cyber-bullying is always anonymous. Several previous studies have found that in fact many of the victims knew who their bully was (Mishna et al. 2009; Vandebosch and Cleemput, 2008).

Many of the respondents in our study thought that cyber-bullies do not actually think they are bullying. In the main they thought that cyber-bullying was seen by

bullies as merely a form of '*harmless fun*', a joke and therefore not an issue. Smith et al. (2004) suggest that 'just having fun' is often a reason bullies give for their behaviour and is similarly one given by others as an explanation of bullying. Others thought cyber-bullies are motivated by a lack of confidence and a desire for control, perhaps because they are too cowardly to bully face to face. One area not questioned is whether those who cyber-bully also use traditional forms of bullying and vice versa. Research by Smith et al. (2008) suggests that there is a link here and that many cyber-bullies are also traditional bullies.

To explore the impact of cyber-bullying a little further, our respondents told us whether their experience of it had affected them. Interestingly, although many thought it potentially harmful, fewer admitted to be affected by it. However when we explored this in more detail in relation to those who had actually experienced cyber-bullying first hand a slightly different story unfolded. A quarter stayed away from school, a third stopped socialising outside school and a relatively higher percentage was affected in relation to their confidence and self-esteem. These findings concur with those of Wolak et al. (2000) who recount that a third of those who reported being bullied reported feeling extremely upset by it.

In asking young people about their experiences of cyber-bullying our study explored their use of support mechanisms. Our findings contradict those from previous studies (Juvonen and Gross; 2008; Mishna et al.2009). Smith et al. (2008) suggest that adults may seem less informed about cyber-bullying and so less likely to be approached. In our study however, although the total number who sought support was small, of those who did seek support, 78% (85) sought support by talking to their parents. This may be a reflection of increased awareness among parents about the issues of online communications, supported to some extent by the responses of 64.4% (273) of young people in our study who said that they thought their parents were aware that cyber-bullying goes on.
 More girls than boys talked to their friends about their experiences of cyber-bullying which is perhaps to be expected as girls tend to have more close knit

friendships and are therefore perhaps more likely to share personal worries and concerns (Dooley et al. 2009). Previous research (Diamanduros et al. 2008) has suggested that helping parents and teachers to understand cyber-bullying should be part of any prevention plan. Young people in our study gave similar suggestions which included more school based development for parents and teachers together and more wide spread national leaflet drops and news items and advertising campaigns.

6.2.2. How does cyber-bullying impact on young people's use of technology?

It would seem from the data that, although over half of the respondents do not worry about cyber-bullying, just under half **do** worry about it. For those that do not worry, this could fit with the view of some of the respondents that it does not exist and that it is the resilience of the victim to deal with it that is the key.

Some key strategies for dealing with cyber-bullying are highlighted by the respondents including changing instant messaging and email addresses and changing mobile numbers. Only a small minority took action by reducing their use of social networking sites/social media. 'Blocking' of some sort was the word most frequently used which confirms the findings of Juvonen and Gross (2008) and Smith et al. (2008), where the prevention tactics used included blocking people, turning off the computer, rejecting calls and messages. In neither of these previous studies did respondents mention reducing the use of social media or networking sites. One tactic specifically mentioned in our study was 'telling someone', especially someone in school or another adult

The analysis above has identified a number of potential impacts for the young people in our study who experienced cyber-bullying. Whilst for the overall majority the effects are limited in their intensity and to some extent non existent, for others the effects can be severe. Those who had been cyber-bullied reported considerably more effects that those who had not. They reported more of an effect on their level of confidence, self-esteem and their level of mental and emotional well being than those who had experienced it indirectly which is perhaps to be expected. However we did find that those who had experienced

cyber-bullying did not necessarily reduce their use of social media. Importantly it has been suggested by the young people in our study, and in previous studies, that any effects of cyber-bullying may be even more harmful than those caused by traditional bullying.

We should note that some respondents did not admit to being affected by cyber-bullying and just under half of those who had been cyber-bullied did not worry about it. Sullivan et al. (2004) argue that the bullying experience is different for everybody in terms of what is deemed important to them, the circumstances and the context of that particular event. This includes the bullied, the bully and the bystander. While the research provide insights into…the rates, characteristics and causes of bullying, it;

> "…can never mitigate against actual bullying events, can never predict who will bully and how, and cannot determine who will be a victim and why" (Sullivan et al. 2004: 6).

6.3 The role of schools in cyber-bullying

The response from schools was very low (28.3%, n11) and so no firm conclusions are drawn. Most of the respondents felt that their schools were proactive in dealing with cyber-bullying and all had policies to deal with incidents. Most stated that they involved pupils in trying to combat the problem and supported pupils who had been bullied in this way in a variety of ways. Young people's perceptions were similar and most of them felt that schools and colleges were aware of the problem and that generally they were proactive in dealing with it. A minority, however, believed that their schools turned a "*blind eye to it*". It is perhaps worth noting that a few young people (all girls) felt that schools should NOT have a role in preventing and or dealing with cyber-bullying because it is something that generally happens outside the boundaries of schools. However Brown et al. (2006) suggest that the duty to take responsibility may well fall to schools and their Boards of Governors. Campbell (2005) recognised this when she emphasised that schools may have to extend their policies beyond school boundaries given the realities of students' use of the internet at home. Willard (2006) believes that schools face a legal conundrum when trying to impose penalties in relation to cyber-bullying. On the

one hand there may be serious consequences if they fail to act. On the other hand they may become embroiled in civil law suits by parents/carers who believe their children have been unfairly treated.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for involving young people in research

This project has shown that young people can be actively involved in the research process from commissioning - to data collection - to analysis - to dissemination but the following need to be considered:

- Funders and commissioners need to be more aware of the time constraints involved when truly involving children and young people in a collaborative way. When research projects are being designed, time needs to be built in to allow for training and development of young people.

- At the beginning of research projects the roles each member of the team would like to play should be negotiated to clarify the extent to which young people want to participate in aspects of the process. This would prevent adult researchers contacting young people who might not like to be involved in particular stages of the process.

7.2 Recommendations for practice/policy

- 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.

- 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 take a holistic approach and which stress the importance of developing values of care and kindness amongst young people.

7.3 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.
- Seek to learn more about understanding the bullying behaviour of cyber-bullies.
- Explore the anonymity of cyber-bullying – is it real or perceived?

Appendix 1

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

Web address: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6S2BJKR

Would you like the chance to win a £15 high street voucher? If so please complete this questionnaire on cyber-bullying. It really shouldn't take long.

Are you as fed up with cyber-bullying as we are?

We will be giving away 10 £15 high street vouchers. If you would like to be entered into this draw then please leave your contact details at the end of the questionnaire. ALL information will be ANONYMOUS and will not be passed onto anybody else. We won't be able to link your contact details to your answers so you are free to say exactly what you like.........

This research is being led by young people like you. They are members of PEAR (Public health, education, awareness, research) a young people's public health reference group supported by the National Children's Bureau (NCB). PEAR supports young people to share their views and priorities about public health research and policy, and the group have chosen cyber-bullying as a research topic as they are interested in finding out more about how it affects young people. PEAR have asked researchers from Anglia Ruskin University to work with them to carry out this research. More information can be found at http://www.ncb.org.uk/pear/home.aspx

This questionnaire is aimed at anyone aged 12-18 years living in England. It would be very helpful if you could answer as many of the questions as you can.

The questionnaire asks:

• About you and where you come from

• Some general questions about cyber-bullying

• The opportunity for you to tell us anything you would like to about your views/thoughts of cyber-bullying

• We have also provided the names of organisations and helplines you can contact if you feel you would like some help, advice or information.

1. Are you?

Male☐
Female☐

2. How old are you?

_____

3. Do you have a long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability (I.e. anything that has affected you, or is likely to affect you for at least a year)?

Yes☐
No ☐
Not sure☐
Prefer not to say☐

4. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

Asian or Asian British☐   Roma or traveller☐
Black or Black British☐   White British☐
Chinese☐   White other☐
Mixed – White and Asian☐   Prefer not to say☐
Mixed – White and Black☐

5. What part of England do you live in? (Please provide the first 3 digits of your postcode e.g. CM1, or the name of the city/town/village you live in)

_____

6. What type of school do you go to? (Please tick all that apply)
State secondary school☐
Private/ fee-paying school☐
Special school☐
Further education or sixth form college☐
Boarding or residential school☐
Not currently in school☐
Other (please tell us)_____

7. How would you describe your religion or spiritual beliefs? If you do not have any religious or spiritual beliefs please say so.

_____

8. Where do you live?
I live with my parent(s)☐
I live with my foster family☐
I live in a children's home☐
I live in a boarding or residential school☐
I live somewhere else (please tell us)_____

9. Do you use any of the following? (Please tick all that apply)
The internet ☐
Social Networking sites☐
Instant messaging☐
Email ☐
Text messages☐
Mobile phone calls ☐
Pictures/videos via mobile phone☐

10. When you use any of the below, how frequently do you use them? Please tick all that apply

	I don't use this method	Less than once a week	One or more times per week	Once or twice a day	More than twice a day
The internet					
Social Networking sites					
Instant Messaging					
Email					
Text messages					
Mobile phone calls					
Pictures/videos via mobile phone					

11. Can you tell us where you use these media? (Please tick all that apply)

	At Home	At school/college	At an internet café	Another place
The internet				
Social Networking sites				
Instant Messaging				
Email				
Text messages				
Mobile phone calls				
Pictures/videos via mobile phone				

12. Please tell us what you think cyber-bullying is? (There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to this question we are just interested in hearing your views)

_____

13. Our research group has defined cyber-bullying in our own way and we believe it to be: "Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of technology, for example mobile phones, email and the internet, deliberately used to upset, hurt and embarrass someone else"
Have you ever (please tick all that apply):
Been cyber-bullied☐
Cyber-bullied others☐
Witnessed cyber bullying☐
Known somebody who has been cyber-bullied☐
Known somebody who has cyber-bullied others☐
Don't know☐
I have not experienced any of the above☐
Please use this box if you would like to tell us more about your answer(s)

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14. If you experienced any form of cyber-bullying (directly involved, witnessed it, know somebody else who was involved) what form did the bullying take?
Social networking sites☐
Instant messaging☐
Email☐
Text messages☐
Picture/videos via mobile phone☐
Mobile phone calls☐

15. If you have ticked any of the above, how has this affected you? Please indicate on the scale

	Prefer not to say	Don't know	Not at all	A little	Quite a lot	A lot	Very
Confidence							
Self esteem							
Mental and emotional wellbeing (e.g. depression, anxiety, nightmares,							

sleep problems)							
Not going to school							
Not socialising outside school							

Any other way it has affected you? Please tell us here

_____

16. If you worry about or have been affected by cyber-bullying what have you done to make yourself safe? (please tick all that apply)
Change my Instant Messenger address ☐
Change my email address ☐
Stopped using social network sites ☐
Changed my mobile number ☐
Use social media less ☐
I don't worry about cyber-bullying ☐
Something else (please use this box to tell us about any of your answers)

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17. If you are worried about or have been affected by cyber-bullying have you sought emotional/practical support?

Yes ☐
No ☐
If you answered 'no' please tell us why you chose not to seek support

_____

18. If you received support who did you receive it from? (Please tick all that apply)
Talk to parents ☐
Talk to friends ☐
Talk to teachers/someone at school/college ☐
Contact a helpline ☐
Use counselling services ☐
Someone else (please tell us)

_____

19. If you received support how useful was it?

	Not very helpful	A little helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful
Support (eg stopping the cyber-bullying or making you feel better)				

Please tell us more about this support

_____

20. Cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying such as physical, verbal, emotional and psychological bullying. Do you agree?
Agree☐
Disagree☐
Not sure☐
Please tell us more if you can

_____

21. People who do things that can be classed as cyber-bullying often don't think that this is bullying. Do you agree?
Agree☐
Disagree☐
Don't know☐
Please tell us more if you can

_____

22. Do you think cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem for you and other young people you know?
Yes☐
No☐
Not sure☐
Please tell us why you chose the answer above

_____

23. In your opinion why might some bullies choose cyber-bullying instead of other methods? (please tick all that apply)
They think they won't get caught☐
Schools/colleges don't deal with cyber-bullying very well☐
They can bully others less obviously☐
They think this is more effective/public☐
The victim can't escape from it☐
Something else (please tell us)

_____

24. My school/college is aware that cyber-bullying goes on
Agree☐
Disagree☐
Don't know☐
Please tell us more if you can

_____

25. In your opinion does your school/college do enough to deal with cyber-bullying?
Yes☐
No☐
Not sure☐
If you would like to tell us more about what your school does please tell us here

_____

26. Do you think your parents/carers are aware that cyber bullying goes on?
Yes☐
No☐
Don't know☐
If you answered 'no' what can be done to make parents/carers more aware of cyber-bullying?

_____

27. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about cyber-bullying?

28. Are there any other questions you think we should have asked?

Below is a list of websites and helpline numbers where you can access advice and information about cyber-bullying or if you would like to speak to someone in confidence about your own experience.

From all the young people in the PEAR group thank you very much for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. When we have collected all the information we will put the results on the webpage and you will be able to see where we use all this information.

Supports

Childline
Website: http://www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Bullying/Pages/Bullying.aspx
Phone: 0800 1111

Samaritans
Website: www.samaritans.org
Phone: 08457 90 90 90

Anti-bullying alliance
Website: http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Bullying advice:
Website: www.bullying.co.uk

If you would like to be entered into the draw to receive a £15 high street voucher then enter your details below. These details will not be used for the research and will remain anonymous. Also to remind you that we won't be able to link your contact details with your answers.

Yes I would like to be entered into the draw to receive a £15 high street voucher. My details are here:
Name:_____
Email:_____

Appendix 2
Focus group draft topic guide

Introducing the focus group
- Thank people for coming
- Tell them why they are here
- What will happen with the data
- Findings launched at the conference

Name game
To make everyone feel at ease we'll play a short name game

Ground rules
Ask group to set their own ground rules on how they would like the session to run. Can use hints e.g. respect for other opinions, speak one at a time etc.
Ask young people their permission to record the focus group.

Demographics
We will ask young people to complete some short questions just asking about their:
- Name
- Age
- Ethnic Background
- Type of school they attend
- If they have a disability
- It will also be interesting to know if they have already completed the questionnaire online

(10 minutes)

Topic guide – based on responses from our web-based survey and questions in the Research Specification – all in red for our records.

Social Networking sites – not too heavy to get young people thinking
(10 minutes)

1. Let's have a conversation about the different types of media young people use to communicate with each other and the benefits they bring.

2. Although wonderful benefits, many young people have reported that cyber-bullying is one of the main challenges they face in the digital world. What do you think about this? (Depending on responses we will ask the next question)

3. Do you think cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem for you and other young people you know?

Traditional V cyber-bullying – to answer the following questions:
- The links between cyber and other forms of bullying
- Whether 'cyber-bullies' consider themselves to be bullies
- Why bullies might chose cyber-bullying as opposed to other methods.
- How young people feel about the differences between private and public bullying, in other words, when the episode is private between a small group or when the cyber-bullying goes public.

(20 minutes)

Sarah and Samia are best friends but one day they have a disagreement and stop speaking to each other. Over the next few days Sarah posts nasty comments about Samia on her Facebook page and Samia becomes very upset. Samia confronts Sarah and asks her why she has been bullying her online but Sarah does not believe she has bullied Samia as she did not do this face-to-face. Do you agree with Sarah?

Furthermore Samia is more upset because these nasty comments where seen by everyone who knows her and not just her small group of friends. Samia feels very embarrassed by it all. She tells Sarah it wouldn't have affected her as much if the information was just shared with a small group rather than everyone who knows her.

In general do you think young people are more affected by cyber-cullying when the episode is private between a small group or when the cyber-bullying goes public to a wider audience?
PROMPT: Does it matter if it's private or public?

1.	Do you think cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying such as physical, verbal, emotional and psychological bullying?

2.	Do you think cyber-bullying has an impact on a young person's confidence and self esteem?

Prompt: Socialising, not going to school, eating disorders, depression etc

3.	Why do you think young people who bully others online choose to bully them in this way?

Making himself safe online: – to answer the following questions:
- When young people are cyber-bullied by just one person or in groups
- Whether cyber-bullying affects the way in which young people use technology (e.g. do they stop using email addresses or social networking sites, or use them differently?)
- Does increasing use of technology, and new technology, make cyber-bullying worse

(15 minutes)

John has recently created his own page on a social networking site in order to stay in contact with his friends over the school holidays. However in the last few weeks John has received nasty threatening messages from a boy in the year above him. He chose to ignore these messages and deleted them when they came in. More recently John has been receiving nasty messages from this older boy and 2 of his friends. He is now feeling very hurt by what they are saying but deleting these messages is not effective. He does not want to close his webpage as this is the way he contacts his friends – what should he do?

Generally, do you think cyber-bullying affects the way in which young people use technology (e.g. do they stop using email addresses or social networking sites, or use them differently?)

In your experience does cyber-bullying tend to happen by just one person or is it done in groups?

The impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health – to generate discussion around the main research question
(10 minutes)

In our survey we asked young people who were either directly involved in cyber-bullying, witnessed cyber-bullying or knew somebody else who was involved how it had affected them. One young person who had been cyber-bullied replied:

"*I developed anorexia nervosa. Although not the single cause of my illness, bullying greatly contributed to my low self-esteem which led to becoming ill.*"

In your experience how has cyber-bullying affected you and/or other young people you know?

Thank you
Thank you for your time and reiterate what we will be doing with the findings
Present high street vouchers

Appendix 3

4.2 Please tell us what you think cyber-bullying is

This question was answered by 93.4% young people (n442). The features of cyber-bullying as described by the young people in this research were four-fold:

1. The medium of communication
2. The behaviour
3. The impact
4. The blame on the victim

4.2.1 The medium of communication

Many young people felt that cyber-bullying consists of traditional bullying methods such as '*harassment', 'antagonising', 'tormenting', 'threatening'* via different forms of technology. Some even regarded the "*physical distance between the victim and the bully*" to be important aspects of the cyber-bullying episode.

> *"Cyber-bullying is when a person is abused over the internet or through other types of electronic things, something that involves communication with other people without them being in your presence." (Girl)*

> *"Writing horrible things to people, antagonizing them online, writing things about them on websites and social networking sites that are hurtful or untrue." (Girl)*

Young people were aware of the vast potential audience of the internet and mobile phones. Some even considered the various types of social media used to cyber-bully others such as phones, email and specific social network sites including Bebo and Facebook.

> *"Cyber-bullying is a type of byllying through social networks eg facebook, twitter, my space and bebo. It also comes through text messages." (Boy)*

> *"Cyber-bullying might be 'Face Book' and 'Nasza Klasa' (POLISH ONE) there are loads of people calling each other names. Cyber-Bulling is not only computer but phones senfing each other rude messages pictures ect. o lets come back to computer some times but not much times people haking computers and controlling it then they saying you are fat ect" (Boy)*

Other networks mentioned included 'Myspace' and 'Formspring'. As well as considering traditional bullying methods, some young people regarded cyber-bullying to be the same as traditional bullying:

> *"Same as normal bullying, minus the physical aspect"*
> *(Boy)*

> *"Everyone says that bully's are cowards, or feel threaterned by thier victim, cyber-bullying is just an extreme example of this" (Girl)*

4.2.2 The behaviour

Some young people considered the features of this behaviour to be 'secretive', 'repetitious', and creating 'fear':

Secretive

> *"I think cyberbullying is where you get bullyed by people you dont know through the internet." (Girl)*

> *"Cyber-bullying is a horrible method of bullying where the bully uses technology to hurt feelings. This is worse because the affected person cannot see the expression on his/her face to see if they are joking or not. On the other side, the bully is using technology as a means of secrecy, so they (sometimes) cannot be identified as well as a barrier" (Girl)*

Repetitious

> *"i think it is where you are getting bullied and harrased everyday over the internet, on social networking websites." (Girl)*

> *"cyber-bullying is where people are bullying you by phone or on the computers and they are always doing it and on your phone saying the are going to kill you." (Girl)*

Creating fear

> *"cyber-bullying is when some one frightens you on any technology like the internet your mobile that the be mean to you it can be very serious at times" (Girl)*

> *"Were somoene is beying threatened through the internet and social networking sites such as facebook, bebo, twitter. it makes the victim fell bad about themselves which mostly leads to depression and sadness" (Boy)*

Others viewed cyber-bullying as a cowardly activity where cyber-bullies are protected by their computer screen intending not to be caught.

> *"I think it is a coward's method, and that it is often very hurtful, and wrong. People don't have the courage to speak to people to their face (even though they shouldn't be bullying anyway), so they do it online. It is also used to supplement other forms of bullying." (Girl)*

> *"I think is just Cowardly, it can lead people to suicide how can someone do that to someone? i think they should be locked up and slapped!!" (Boy)*

4.2.3 The impact

This impact varied for young people and included the feelings of the victim, the intention involved with cyber-bullying to target vulnerable young people, excluding young people and intentionally sharing hurtful information about others via social media.

<u>Feelings of the victim</u>

> *"I think that cyber-bulling is a cruel way to bully people on 'social' net working sites because it can push people over the edge and my try a suiside atempt! Also because my I.C.T teacher told us a story about a girl who kept on getting horrible text messages of her 'friends' and tried to kill her self!" (Boy)*

> *"Cyber-bullying is a way of bullying people on the internet. People are mean to others they don't know and sometimes they do know. Sometimes they bully them so hard they cause the victim to hurt or kill themselves" (Boy)*

<u>Targeting and excluding vulnerable young people</u>

> *"Cyber-Bullying is bullies picking on easy, vunerable children via mobile or computer" (Boy)*

> *"I think cyber-bullying is a way of making other people who are innocent and get carried to doing all these bad things that other people do and the victim who they do it to is ending up there lifes. We know that nearly or more childen ended up killing them selves because of the bullying the other people do to the victim" (Girl)*

> *"Bullying using cyber-technology. Making fun of a person/group, isolating someone/a group, saying nasty things to someone/a group etc using any kind of modern technology" (Girl)*

<u>Sharing hurtful information about others over social media</u>

> *"i think cyber-bullying is when you get your picture took by 'friends' and then those 'friends' change that picture without your permission in ways you don't feel comfortable and the picture is passed around the school and you end up being called names." (Boy)*

> *"using the internet and mobile tech to mess with peoples heads. spreading rumours and sharing personal stuff and pics with people I don't want. using it to spy on people. ordering deliveries of stuff that will upset people. leaving people out of stuff but making it obvious they are shut out." (Girl)*

`4.2.4 The Blame on the Victim

A minority of young people felt that cyber-bullying was just '*nonsense*' and one

young person felt it didn't exist:

> *"i think cyber-bullying is the biggest load of nonsence i have ever heard if people get bullied they should tell the teacher before it gets worst" (Boy)*

> *"I don't really think it exists. If you're being cyber-"bullied" then there is something wrong with you- it is insanely easy to avoid, by blocking people and so on. Perhaps it consists of people insulting you online?" (Boy)*

> *"stupid because why cant the bully say it to your face" (Boy)*

Appendix 4

Table 1: Effects of cyber-bullying for all respondents answering this question (47.8%, n226)

	Gender	Prefer not to say	Don't know	Not at all	A little	Quite a lot	A lot	Very
Confidence	Boy	7.0% (5)	12.7% (9)	**45.1% (32)**	15.5% (11)	9.9% (7)	4.2% (3)	5.66% (4)
	Girl	6.0% (9)	11.3% (17)	**36.0% (54)**	26.7% (40)	7.3% (11)	5.3% (8)	7.3% (11)
	Total	6.3% (14)	11.8% (26)	**38.9% (86)**	23.1% (51)	8.1% (18)	5.0% (11)	6.8% (15)
Self-Esteem	Boy	6.2% (4)	13.8% (9)	**50.8% (33)**	13.8% (9)	3.1% (2)	4.6% (3)	7.7% (5)
	Girl	6.3% (9)	14.6% (21)	**37.5% (54)**	22.9% (33)	8.3% (12)	4.2% (6)	6.3% (9)
	Total	6.2% (13)	14.4% (30)	**41.6% (87)**	20.1% (42)	6.7% (14)	4.3% (9)	6.7% (14)
Mental and emotional well-being	Boy	7.4% (5)	13.2% (9)	**52.9% (36)**	16.2% (11)	1.5% (1)	2.9% (2)	5.9% (4)
	Girl	7.5% (11)	10.3% (15)	**45.9% (67)**	19.9% (29)	6.8% (10)	4.8% (7)	4.8% (7)
	Total	7.5% (16)	11.2% (24)	**48.1% (103)**	18.7% (40)	5.1% (11)	4.2% (9)	5.1% (11)
Not going to school	Boy	7.2% (5)	8.7% (6)	**68.1% (47)**	7.2% (5)	0% (0)	4.3% (3)	4.3% (3)
	Girl	7.4% (11)	8.1% (12)	**66.2% (98)**	8.1% (12)	4.1% (6)	2.7% (4)	3.4% (5)
	Total	7.4% (16)	8.3% (18)	**66.8% (145)**	7.8% (17)	2.8% (6)	3.2% (7)	3.7% (8)
Not socialising outside school	Boy	7.4% (5)	11.8% (8)	**54.4% (37)**	11.8% (8)	2.9% (2)	4.4% (3)	7.4% (5)
	Girl	4.2% (6)	9.7% (14)	**64.6% (93)**	13.2% (19)	2.8% (4)	2.8% (4)	2.8% (4)
	Total	5.2% (11)	10.4% (22)	**61.3% (130)**	12.7% (27)	2.8% (6)	3.3% (7)	4.2% (9)

Of the total number of respondents, 38.9% (n=86) stated that cyber-bullying had had no impact on their *confidence*, 43% (n=95) said it had, ranging from '*a little'* (23.1%, n=51) to '*very'* (6.8%, n=15). With regards to *self-esteem* 41.6% (n=87) said cyber-bullying had had no effect, while 37.8% (n=79) said it had ranging from *'a little'* (20.1%, n=42) to '*very'* (6.7%, n=14). Finally for *mental*

and emotional well-being, 48.1% (n=103) admit that cyber-bullying had no impact but 33.1% (n=71) said it had ranging from '*a little*' (18.7%, n=40) to '*very*' (5.1%, n=11) (Table 1).

Table 2: Effects of cyber-bullying for all respondents who had been cyber-bullied answering his question (96.6%, n84)

	Gender	Prefer not to say	Don't know	Not at all	A little	Quite a lot	A lot	Very
Confidence	**Boy**	3.8% (1)	7.7% (2)	23.1% (6)	**30.8% (8)**	15.4% (4)	7.7% (2)	11.5% (3)
	Girl	7.1% (4)	5.4% (3)	19.6% (11)	**30.4% (17)**	12.5% (7)	10.7% (6)	14.3% (8)
	Total	6.1% (5)	6.1% (5)	20.7% (17)	**30.5% (25)**	13.4% (11)	9.8% (8)	13.4% (11)
Self-Esteem	**Boy**	4.2% (1)	8.3% (2)	**37.5% (9)**	16.7% (4)	8.3% (2)	12.5% (3)	12.5% (3)
	Girl	5.6% (3)	13.0% (7)	13.0% (7)	**31.5% (17)**	14.8% (8)	7.4% (4)	14.8% (8)
	Total	5.1% (4)	11.5% (9)	20.5% (16)	**25.6% (21)**	12.8% (10)	9.0% (7)	14.1% (11)
Mental and emotional well-being	**Boy**	4.0% (1)	12.0% (3)	**44.0% (11)**	16.0% (4)	4.0% (1)	8.0% (2)	12.0% (3)
	Girl	11.1% (6)	3.7% (2)	**27.8% (15)**	24.1% (13)	9.3% (5)	11.1% (6)	13.0% (7)
	Total	8.9% (7)	6.3% (5)	**32.9% (26)**	21.5% (17)	7.6% (6)	10.1% (8)	12.7 (10)
Not going to school	**Boy**	4.0% (1)	8.0% (2)	**64.0% (16)**	8.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	8.0% (2)	8.0% (2)
	Girl	1.8% (1)	5.5% (3)	**61.8% (34)**	12.7% (7)	3.6% (2)	7.3% (4)	7.3% (4)
	Total	2.5% (2)	6.3% (5)	**62.5% (50)**	11.3% (9)	2.5% (2)	7.5% (6)	7.5% (6)
Not socialising outside school	**Boy**	3.8% (1)	7.7% (2)	**42.3% (11)**	19.2% (5)	3.8% (1)	7.7% (2)	15.4% (4)
	Girl	1.9% (1)	3.7% (2)	**59.3% (32)**	22.2% (12)	5.6% (3)	1.9% (1)	5.6% (3)
	Total	2.5% (2)	5.0% (4)	**53.8% (43)**	21.3% (17)	5.0% (4)	3.8% (3)	8.8% (7)

For those who had been cyber-bullied, the most common response to 'confidence' was '*a little*' (30.5%, n=25) while the most common response from the overall population was '*not at all*' (38.9%, n=86). For 'self-esteem', the

general population response was *'not at all'* (41.6%, n=87) for both boys and girls, but for those who had been cyber-bullied, boys were more likely to choose the option '*not at all'* (37.5%, n=9) while girls were more likely to choose the option '*a little'* (31.5%, n=17).

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