Several cases of suicide among young victims of cyberbullying have garnered recent national attention in high-profile media. The National Crime Prevention Council estimates that almost half of all American teens are affected by cyberbullying, raising important questions about its impact on adolescent mental health and psychological development.

While the definition of cyberbullying varies, it is generally characterized as using an electronic device for aggressive, repeated and intentional acts of bullying such as name calling, sending threatening emails, placing photos of persons on the Internet without permission and sending viruses.

Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying, for example, due to the lack of physical and social cues. Technology allows would-be bullies to separate themselves from their targets and disseminate cruel content to wider audiences. Additionally, messages and pictures can be sent or posted anonymously, further distancing the perpetrators from detection. Cyberbullying, while popularly seen as an adolescent problem, also occurs among younger children and adults.

The sources listed in this article highlight the growing literature base that can inform psychologists about cyberbullying and how to help perpetrators and victims.


Summary

In 2008, 20,406 ninth- through twelfth-grade students in Massachusetts completed surveys assessing their bullying victimization and psychological distress in a study aimed at documenting the prevalence of cyberbullying and school bullying, and the correlation between both types of victimization and increased risk of psychological harm. About one third of respondents indicated being a victim of some kind of bullying (6.4 percent cyberbullying, 16.4 percent school bullying, 9.4 percent both). A majority (59.7 percent) of cyberbullying victims in the study were also school bullying victims; 36.3 percent of school bullying victims were also cyberbullying victims. Victimization was higher among nonheterosexually identified students. Girls were more likely than boys to report cyberbullying whereas there was no gender difference in reports of being victims of school bullying. Victims reported lower school performance and school attachment, and analyses indicated that distress was highest among victims of both cyberbullying and school bullying. The study concluded that there is a need for prevention efforts that address both school and cyberbullying and their relation to school performance and mental health, as well as a clear need to address and protect students who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual or who may be questioning their sexual orientation.

Practical Implications

Not surprisingly, girls reported more cyberbullying than boys, which is consistent with girls’ increased use of social media in peer relationships. It’s important to note that cyberbullying is often more prevalent via text messaging and cell phone use, even more so than via websites such as Facebook. Again, not surprisingly, individuals who do not identify as heterosexual are more likely to be victims of bullying. Targeted prevention and intervention programs for girls and gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth may be necessary in order to reach those most at risk for victimization. Additionally, research suggests that victims of cyberbullying frequently reciprocate cyberconflict; differentiating between instances of sole victimization and instances of mutual cyberbullying may be important in driving intervention efforts. Given that the impact of such bullying can manifest directly in the school environment with low performance and problems with mental health, psychologists and other providers in schools...
can be critical to identifying and reducing risks and incidents of all forms of bullying.


**Summary**

According to the contemporary General Strain Theory (GST), when a person experiences strain, such as failure to achieve goals, the loss of positive stimuli or the presentation of negative stimuli, they are more likely to experience negative emotions that, in turn, lead to deviant behavior. In order to determine if traditional and cyberbullying were deviant outcomes of negative emotions caused by strain, the authors conducted a survey on the occurrence of both types of bullying, as well as the experience of strain and negative emotions. The sample consisted of approximately 2,000 middle school students from one of the largest school districts in the United States. Results indicated that both forms of bullying were directly associated with strain and the experience of negative emotion. However, contrary to the GST, the experience of negative emotions did not mediate the relationship between strain and either type of bullying. Rather, strain and negative emotions’ influence on bullying seem to be independent of each other.

**Practical Implications**

It is clear from this study that both strain and negative emotions influence the likelihood of bullying. To prevent youth from attempting to cope with strain and negative emotions in an unconstructive or deviant manner, for example through bullying, clinicians can help youth recognize what triggers problematic behavior and develop more positive coping methods. This could be in the form of encouragement to participate in physical and mental extracurricular activities that occupy students’ time and help them find satisfaction and self-assurance. Health care providers can also help students identify ways to build peer support. Furthermore, actions could also be taken to diminish the causes of strain among youth in different environments. Clinicians should keep in mind that some sources of strain among youth, such as broken romantic relationships or parental divorce, may not be evident as an antecedent to bullying at first. Identifying and alleviating these sources of strain may also prove fruitful in reducing corresponding experiences of negative emotions and resulting bullying.


**Summary**

To shed light on the developmental, legal and mental health issues surrounding the occurrence of bullying and cyberbullying, this article provides an overview and case examples of the different types of bullying situations, participants and tactics to thwart bullying. Most recently, bullying and cyberbullying have become a more visible problem due to the influx of high-profile school violence and suicide incidences associated with bullying victimization. Accordingly, 32 of the 48 states with anti-bullying legislation have added a section on cyberbullying to enable school administrators to respond to these situations that occur outside of school. The authors note that bullies are more likely to develop or have an externalizing disorder, for example ADHD, while victims are more likely to suffer from anxiety or depression. Moreover, by their early twenties, the majority of school bullies have been convicted of some sort of crime.

Cyberbullying is differentiated from traditional bullying by the greater potential for escalation, due to the lack of physically present barriers, and expansion of the conflict to “cybergangbullying.” The authors introduce a continuum of bullying inclusive of the bully, the victim and the bystander(s), such as accomplices and defenders. By providing a functional assessment of the factors that sustain each of the participants’ behaviors, the authors are able to address the long-term negative effects of bullying, which include the development of conduct disorder for bullies and PTSD for the victims and potentially observers. Furthermore, developmentally sensitive strategies for avoiding and responding to bullying-type situations are provided to assist individuals and their support systems to foster an environment that precludes involvement in bullying-type situations.

**Practical Implications**

Expanding and distinguishing the individual roles in social interactions will help clinicians better understand the dynamics of the bullying situation and identify the residual
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**Communicate regularly.** Don’t let too much time go by without being in touch with your referral sources. Depending on your relationship with a particular individual, call, email, send a follow-up letter or meet for lunch periodically to build and maintain the relationship.

**Express your gratitude.** When professionals begin to refer to you, call to thank them personally. If someone refers to you regularly, be sure to periodically let that person know you appreciate him or her sending business your way. During the winter holidays, send a card or a nominal token of thanks.

**Make referrals to your referral sources.** Your contacts will view their relationship with you as mutually beneficial and will be more likely to reciprocate.

**Grow your referrals exponentially.** Once you have an established relationship with referral sources, consider asking them to send information to, or put you in touch with, other professionals they know who might be interested in your services. In some cases, your referral sources may even be willing to put a stack of your business cards and brochures in their waiting area.

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effects bullying has on each participant, including bystanders. Identifying the different roles individuals may play in cyberbullying situations may determine different intervention strategies and coping mechanisms. Additionally, clinicians must be mindful of the duality of bullying roles in that one person might be in more than one role at different times. Teaching students how to deflect rather than reciprocate cyberbullying may help to reduce the incidence of mutual bullying. Clinicians may also need to identify their state’s legislation on bullying and cyberbullying to inform their decisions regarding necessary actions to help parents intervene or prevent the cyberbullying. The importance of contextual factors surrounding bullying is emphasized, illuminating the need to consider the systemic and environmental factors when addressing bullying. Lastly, although different mental health problems are associated with bullies compared to victims, treating those problems in full recognition of the impact of bullying on the individual’s life may serve to both improve the mental health disorder as well as reduce the incidence of bullying.


**Summary**

Using the same data described in the previous article, the authors evaluated the relationships among bullying, cyberbullying and suicide. Twenty percent of the almost 2,000 middle school respondents reported seriously thinking about suicide. Youth who had either engaged in bullying behaviors or been victims of bullying behaviors (both traditional and cyber) were more likely to report suicidal ideation, although being a victim was a stronger predictor of having suicidal ideation. Bullying victims and offenders (both traditional and cyber) were more likely to have attempted suicide than those who were not exposed to bullying. The researchers caution, however, that exposure to bullying (traditional or cyber, offender or victim) was only a small contributor to youth experience of suicidal ideation or attempt at suicide. The researchers noted that a variety of other factors also contributed to these outcomes.

**Practical Implications**

Just as traditional forms of peer aggression are known to be linked to increases in suicidal thoughts, cyberbullying is linked as well to increased suicidal ideation. Prevention and intervention programs related to cyberbullying may need to incorporate a component on suicidal thoughts and behavior. While cyberbullying itself may not lead to suicide attempts, cyberbullying may be another factor that adds to a young person’s feelings of isolation or hopelessness that ultimately can lead to suicidal ideation.

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