Cyber bullying in South Africa: Impact and responses

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Introduction

The considerable increase over the past few years in the use of mobile phones, text messaging, emails, chat rooms and social networks has altered our social environments and has in many ways directed our social interactions. Comparative data suggests that South Africans 'are one of the highest users of mobile technology and mobile social networking on the continent' compared to other countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.[1] Young people, who are known to acquire technological skills more rapidly than adults, lead the way in the daily use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Recent studies show that nine out of ten (92.9%) 12- to 24-year-olds either own or have access to a mobile phone, which they expend for their personal use.[2] A survey conducted in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg of learners aged between 13 and 17 years old found that 81% had access to a computer at home and 62% were able to use their home computers to access the internet.[3] The growing affordability of smartphones and data bundles has further decreased the number of youth in South Africa who have no access to the internet.

While there are countless benefits to this technology, including rewarding social connections, creating opportunities for academic and social support, identity exploration and cross-cultural interactions, this technology has the potential to expose young people to high-risk content and individuals they may not otherwise have had contact with. The often uncensored and unmonitored nature of the cyber environment can expose young people to pornography, violence, harmful information, sexual predators, disturbing images and, more alarmingly, has paved the way for new forms of aggression and victimisation to be perpetrated against the country's child and youth population.

Cyber bullying, cyber violence, cyber aggression, internet bullying, electronic bullying, internet harassment or online harassment are terms used to refer to violence and aggression perpetrated through ICTs. Although studies make use of differing terms, these concepts generally refer to any discomfort or harm that is intentionally and repeatedly inflicted on a specific person or group.[4] These cruel acts may include the sending of harassing e-mails or instant messages, posting obscene, insulting and slanderous messages on online bulletin boards or social networking sites, or developing web pages to promote and disseminate defamatory content.

Cyber bullying via mobile phones may take the form of sending malicious text messages or text messages of a sexual nature (known as sexting), or taking pictures and videos of someone with the intention of distributing the content to others via mobile phones or online.[5] Individuals may also impersonate others online or create fake profiles with which to perpetrate cyber aggression.

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bullying', young people do not necessarily identify with the term in the experiences they have online. According to Marwick and Boyd, adolescents are more inclined to use terms such as 'drama' to conceptualise bullying – a term that trivialises the experience, while at the same time retains their sense of agency as opposed to positioning themselves as victims within the exchange.[6] Dismissing online interactions as 'drama' further lessens the importance of the conflict and situates the experience as a simple and natural part of adolescent life.[7] This is important to consider in addressing the issue and educating youth about cyber bullying, as many teenagers may not necessarily place themselves within a bullying rhetoric used by parents or educators. This highlights the need for a child-centred response to cyber violence rather than adult-centred approaches, which often tend to be instinctual and based on gut responses.

The study of cyber bullying has not kept up with the proliferation of ICTs in South Africa. Hence, there is a dearth of literature on the nature and extent of cyber violence at a national level, including the consequences of such aggression. This paper attempts to bridge the gap and contribute to the understanding of this social phenomenon by describing the impact that cyber aggression has on children and youth. By drawing on current literature, the paper further outlines some of the more common safety initiatives and programmes employed in response to the scourge of cyber violence both locally and internationally. Finally, the paper highlights the need for evidence-based approaches to cyber violence that take into account the everyday lived experiences of children and youth by emphasising a whole-school approach to addressing cyber violence. This approach has proven to be successful in addressing traditional bullying and may also be the way forward in cyber violence prevention.

The nature of cyber bullying in South Africa

Two major quantitative studies have been conducted recently to gauge young people's access to, use of and experiences in using ICTs. The findings from the 2009 Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention's (CJCP) pilot study[8] and the 2011 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University study[9] support the notion that ICTs are in high use among young people in South Africa, just as they are internationally (see text box below).

The 2009 CJCP pilot study of 1,726 youths recruited from Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth found that:[i]

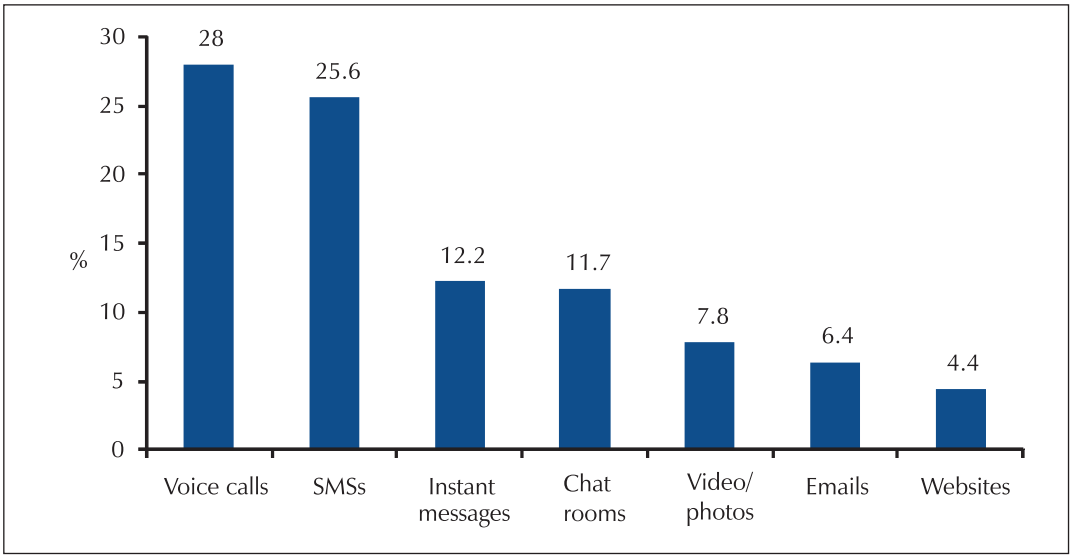
- 73.9% of young people had access to the internet either at home or at school
- 64% reported using MXit[ii]
- 47.9% had access to the internet on their mobile phones
- 31.4% had a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter or Hi5
- 30.4% participated in online chat rooms and used instant messaging applications such as MSN and Yahoo chat

The 2011 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University study of 1,594 learners in grades 6-12 at six schools (three primary schools and three secondary schools) in the Nelson Mandela Bay area found that:[iii]

- 90% of young people use social networking sites
- MXit and Facebook were favoured above all other sites, with 67% accessing these sites on a daily basis
- Social networking (51.2%) was South African youth's favourite online activity, followed by gaming (20.2%), web surfing (13.8%), music (7.3%), downloading (5.5%) and other (2.1%)

i Burton P & Mutongwizo T, *Inescapable violence: Cyber bullying and electronic violence against young people in South Africa*. Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, CJCP Issue Paper, No. 8, 2009.
ii MXit is a free chat application for mobile phones that incorporates elements of chat rooms, instant messaging and social networking.
iii De Lange M & von Solms R, The importance of raising e-Safety awareness amongst children in South Africa. Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference on world wide web applications, 13-16 September 2011. Johannesburg, South Africa, 2011. Available online: http://www.zaw3.co.za/index.php/ZA-WWW/2011/paper/viewFile/423/131 [accessed 10 January 2012].

Figure 1: Young South Africans' experiences of cyber aggression



Source: Burton P & Mutongwizo T, *Inescapable violence: Cyber bullying and electronic violence against young people in South Africa*. Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, CJCP Issue Paper, No. 8, 2009.

This highlights the need for a child-centred response to cyber violence rather than adult-centred approaches, which often tend to be instinctual and based on gut responses.

The statistics also demonstrate the high incidence of cyber aggression among South Africa's youth. Over a third (37%) of young people surveyed in the CJCP study admitted to having experienced some form of cyber aggression either at home or at school.[10] This was consistent with the 36% of young people who were found to have been cyber bullied in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University study.[11]

According to the CJCP, this figure increases to nearly half of all respondents (46.8%) when harassment via the telephone is included in the analysis.[12] These figures are in line with international statistics: a study in the United States (US) found that 30% of a sample of young people reported being victims of cyber bullying,[13] while a Canadian study showed that 21.9% of young people in grades 6–11 experienced at least one form of cyber bullying behaviour during the three months prior to the study.[14]

Cyber bullying occurs across a diverse range of mediums, the most common being voice calls (28%) and text messages (25.6%) (*see Figure 1*). Since many young people carry their mobile phones with them at all times, this form of cyber aggression has become the most difficult to escape.[15] Cyber aggression via mobile phones also tends to occur via MXit, with 26% of respondents experiencing insults, particularly race-based insults, according to a UNICEF study.[16]

South African girls are found to be only slightly more susceptible to cyber bullying both at home (43.4%) and in the school environment (33.1%) compared to boys (42.4% at home and 29.3% at school)[17] – a trend observed internationally as well. Wade and Beran suggest that this is because the verbal and relational nature of cyber bullying fits in closely with female socialisation processes.[18]

Research, however, indicates no significant differences between the sexes with regard to the perpetration of cyber violence.[19] In the 2009 study, 18.3% of the participants admitted to bullying someone via text message (SMS), 16.9% had bullied someone via phone calls, 12.2% via chat rooms, 11.8% via instant messaging and 9.2% via video or photos.

- In the US, 11% of young people admitted to being perpetrators of cyber bullying.[i]
- A higher proportion of young people in a Canadian study reported being the perpetrators of cyber bullying (29.7%).[ii]

i Patchin JW & Hinduja S, Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: A preliminary look at cyber bullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 4(2), pp 148-169, 2006

ii Wade A & Beran T, Cyber bullying: The new era of bullying. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 26(44), pp 44-61, 2011.

Young people are exposed to high levels of aggression online as witnesses, victims or perpetrators, or, more likely, a combination of these throughout their daily ICT use.

An important finding in the CJCP study is that the line between perpetrators and victims of cyber bullying is most often blurred; seven out of ten (69.7%) perpetrators of cyber bullying had themselves been bullied. It therefore appears that being a victim of cyber aggression may increase the likelihood of perpetrating such aggression against others, perhaps in retaliation. This is in line with international data, with one study indicating that three-quarters (75%) of those who victimised others online were also targets of cyber bullying themselves.[20]

In addition to young people being victimised and/or perpetrating cyber aggression, nearly half (46%) claimed to have witnessed cyber bullying in online spaces.[21] This indicates that young people are exposed to high levels of aggression online as witnesses, victims or perpetrators or, more likely, a combination of these throughout their daily ICT use.

Cyber bullying: Why should we worry?

Cyber bullying tends to have similar effects on children as traditional bullying, but with a number of important differences that can exacerbate its negative consequences.

Cyber bullying tends to have similar effects on children as traditional bullying, but with a number of important differences that can exacerbate its negative consequences. It is argued that one of the most harmful aspects of the internet is that people can remain anonymous when communicating with others. This increases the possibility of people communicating in ways that they may not do in a face-to-face interaction.[22] Believing that they will not get caught means that the fear of discovery, which generally acts as a behavioural control in people, is absent in the cyber world.[23]

Apart from anonymity, cyber bullying is further distinguished from traditional forms of bullying due to the absence of non-verbal cues, such as body language and emotional reactions. As a result, individuals may not realise the effect they are having on others, whether they have taken the social exchange too far, or when their comments have been misinterpreted.[24] And not being able to see the harm that is caused to another person diminishes the likelihood of an empathic reaction.

Another troubling aspect of cyber bullying is that, unlike traditional bullying which occurs in the physical environment, cyber bullying can occur at any time and place. This means that cyber bullying can occur at ease and without constraint, and a victim can be mistreated and tormented continuously, using communication tools. In addition, online bullying comments and images can be distributed to a wide audience very quickly, which affects the everyday reality that victims may experience in the physical environment.[25] Insults and comments via ICTs, unlike traditional bullying, can be preserved and reread several times, which exacerbates its harmful consequences. The severity of cyber bullying is underscored by reported suicides, murders and school drop-outs as a result of the experience.[26]

Although there is evidence to suggest that cyber bullying is correlated with traditional bullying and that it can be an extension of school bullying, whereby perpetrators continue to victimise youth who are already targets at school,[27] the new technology is also exposing new groups of adolescents, who are not victims of traditional bullying, to victimisation online. In fact, international literature indicates that less than a quarter (23%) of youth who are victimised online also experience harassment at school.[28] This means that the new forms of technology have created a vulnerability for over two-thirds of victims, which they may not have otherwise experienced.[29] As with traditional bullying, which can spill over into the cyber world, children who are cyber bullied may also begin to be bullied at school.

Victims of cyber bullying can suffer many emotional and psychological problems that are similar to traditional forms of bullying. According to a 2006 study by Patchin and Hinduja, 42.5% of young people who experienced cyber bullying in the US reported feeling frustrated, almost 40% were angry and over a quarter (27%) felt sad.[30] Other literature suggests that victims of cyber bullying are significantly more likely to report depressive symptoms, emotional distress and becoming perpetrators of cyber bullying themselves.[31]

The use of different types of technology to perpetrate violence varies in prevalence and may give rise to differing levels of

distress. For example, receiving an aggressive text message on a mobile phone may have a different effect compared to having a defamatory message about oneself posted on a public forum. While these differences are not yet well understood, there is growing evidence to suggest that experiences of cyber violence negatively affect school functioning and the school environment in general.[32] For example, experiences of cyber bullying have been linked to school conduct problems, weapon-carrying at school and low caregiver–adolescent connectedness.[33]

Hinduja and Patchin elsewhere purport that victims of cyber bullying may be at risk of other negative developmental and behavioural consequences, such as school violence and delinquency. The study found that victims of cyber bullying were significantly more likely to report substance use, cheating on a school test, being absent from school without an excuse, assaulting a peer and damaging property, indicating that emotional distress may lead to deviant coping behaviours.[34] Another study by the same authors found that suicide was a further risk factor linked to cyber bullying (termed cyberbullicide), and that victims were nearly twice as likely to have attempted suicide compared to youth who had not experienced cyber bullying.[35]

It is argued that young people are so vulnerable to cyber aggression because they are not aware of how to behave in the cyber world. Some young people may be unable to differentiate between virtual reality and physical reality, and may begin to view the cyber world as an extension of their real world.[36] This world can become so real that children may choose to commit suicide over it. This speaks to the need to educate children (and adults) more realistically about internet usage and the context of cyberspace. However, in cases where cyber bullying is an extension of traditional bullying, the cyber world affects their day-to-day reality. In these instances, it is difficult to separate the cyber world from the lived reality of the individual.

Studies also indicate that there is a low level of support offered to victims of cyber aggression. Over a third (36%) of high school students in Canada believed that adults in the school did not try to stop cyber bullying when they were informed that it was happening.[37] These findings show that children may not trust adults to understand cyber bullying enough to respond to it in a way that will not aggravate their situation. There is therefore an urgent need for responses to cyber bullying within the school context which facilitate the reporting of these incidents. Increasing awareness about the issue among adults is also critical in order to tackle the issue effectively.

Given the dearth of literature on the impact of cyber bullying in the South African context, international findings may pinpoint some important effects on children that

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CYBER BULLYING CAN LEAD TO:

- Depression, suicidal ideation and other psychological problems
- Development of somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach aches
- Impaired concentration (affecting school performance)
- Truancy
- Anxiety and fear of being rejected, excluded or humiliated
- Loneliness and isolation
- Substance abuse
- Delinquency and aggression
- Weapon-carrying
- Poor parent-caregiver relationships (as a result of children lashing out at family members who are often unaware of the cyber bullying being experienced)
- Offline victimisation

Source: Kowalski RM, Limber SP & Agatston PW, *Cyber bullying: Bullying in the digital age*.UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008; De Wet C, *The voices of victims and witnesses of school bullying*. Department of Comparative Education and Education Management. University of the Free State, 2005.

The emerging evidence that cyber aggression is related to a range of psycho-social and school problems highlights the need for a comprehensive child-centred intervention strategy to ensure that perpetrators face consequences and that victims are offered the necessary support to mitigate the negative effects of cyber bullying.

There is often a lack of monitoring and supervision of children in their use of ICTs, which allows cyber bullying to occur unnoticed and for an extended period of time without any intervention. Many young people suffer in silence and do not report instances of cyber bullying for fear that their access to computers or mobile phones will be limited, especially since computers and mobile phones have become a central means of communication among young people.

The study by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University further established young people's reporting of cyber bullying and found that nearly half did not report the incident to anyone. When asked who the most likely person was that they would report cyber bullying to, 50% said they would prefer to talk to a friend or peer, 40% would talk to a parent, while only 2% would talk to an educator.[i] Once again, these findings are in line with international findings. A study in the US found that 56.6% of young people were comfortable talking to a friend about their victimisation, but fewer than 9% informed a parent or teacher about their experience.[ii]

i De Lange M & von Solms R, The importance of raising e-Safety awareness amongst children in South Africa. Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference on world wide web applications, 13-16 September 2011. Johannesburg, South Africa, 2011. Available online: http://www.zaw3.co.za/index.php/ZA-WWW/2011/paper/viewFile/423/131 [accessed 10 January 2012].

ii Patchin JW & Hinduja S, Bullies move beyond the schoolyard: A preliminary look at cyber bullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 4(2), pp 148-169, 2006.

need to be considered in drawing up safety initiatives and programmes. The emerging evidence that cyber aggression is related to a range of psycho-social and school problems highlights the need for a comprehensive child-centred intervention strategy to ensure that perpetrators face consequences and that victims are offered the necessary support to mitigate the negative effects of cyber bullying.[38] Unfortunately, there is little empirical data about how exactly this problem should be addressed.

The paper now takes a closer look at some of the more common safety initiatives and programmes that are currently in place both in South Africa and internationally.

Responses to cyber bullying: What is currently being done?

There are a number of government policies and acts in place in South Africa, which are intended to keep children safe from exposure to harmful content in the media. While it does not specifically deal with online safety, the Films and Publications Act (No. 65 of 1996) monitors and evaluates other media for their suitability for various audiences.

The function of the Film and Publication Board is to regulate the creation, production, possession, broadcasting and distribution of films, interactive computer games and certain publications, as well as to advise consumers in making informed decisions so as to protect the public from unintended exposure to disturbing and potentially harmful material.[39] The board has additional structures in place, such as a hotline, and has established strong partnerships with law enforcement and other organisations.[40] The board is currently in the process of forming partnerships with various stakeholders to create awareness programmes related to cyber bullying and sexting.

In order to deal specifically with the issue of children's safety and ICT use, the Department of Communications is working on a 'Children and ICT' strategy that is expected to be released this year. The strategy aims to support the protection of children in the ICT sector while promoting access to and usage of ICTs, which is seen as promoting the socio-economic wellbeing of society.[41] Similarly, the Department of Basic Education has released draft guidelines on e-safety in schools (discussed later).

Safety strategies to deal with cyber aggression need to be addressed from two perspectives, namely, education and technology.[42] These two perspectives should be aligned to form a coordinated approach to online safety, which includes children, parents, technology-related businesses, government departments and others working together to make online spaces safe for young users. There is also a constant need to update strategies due to the fluidity and rapid evolution of technology. Research in the field needs to occur on an on-going

basis in order to build on the limited knowledge base. The following section discusses some of the technological and education responses for online safety.

Technological responses

In response to the negative effects of cyber aggression and the need to safeguard children and their wellbeing, the ICT industry has been compelled to develop and implement strategies in order to protect young users. Blocking and filtering software is one of the primary means to keep children from accessing harmful content online. While of paramount importance, the sole reliance on this software is insufficient to address the problem as young people are very knowledgeable about the ways to circumvent various content filters.[43] Apart from this, it has been found that the most effective filtering software only blocks between 10% and 20% of the inappropriate content found on the internet, providing further evidence that this cannot be the sole action taken to ensure safety.[44]

Various service providers have taken action to increase the security of their users. In 2010, MXit announced a zero tolerance policy for any user found to be posting explicit or offensive material in public areas of the service, which would result in them being banned from MXit. The company announced that it had made new developments in tracing and identifying users who post such material or who use the service to prey on others, which allows for their immediate removal from the system.

Additionally, if the situation warrants, information may be handed over to the police cyber crimes unit.[45] Section 24 of the Films and Publications Act holds owners and operators of telecommunications targeted at and used by children responsible for taking the necessary steps to ensure that their services are not used for committing offences against children.[46] The move by MXit was thus welcomed by the Film and Publication Board.

In the same year, the three major mobile networks in South Africa (MTN, Cell C and Vodacom) blocked access to the Outoilet website, which was found to be a hub for cyber bullying and exposed children to grooming by paedophiles as well as the potential exchange of child pornography on the website.[47] The site owners have since shut down the chat rooms on the website.[48]

Social networks such as Myspace have also adopted safety measures to protect their users by airing public service announcements promoting online safety, as well as by having rotating banners on their pages in 2006. Myspace has strengthened its staff's capacity to screen and remove inappropriate content and profiles, including deleting thousands of profiles belonging to registered sex offenders in the US, as well as implementing restrictions that prevent such offenders from creating profiles in future.[49] In addition, Myspace has implemented a range of other practical strategies, these include:[50]

- restricting access to younger users aged 13 to 16 years by automatically setting their profiles to private (individuals younger than 13 are not allowed to set up Myspace pages). This was done to prevent younger users from being contacted by adults. Users aged 16 and older can set their profiles to private if they choose to do so.

- not allowing users who are 18 and older to add users who are younger than 16, unless they can supply the person's full name or email address to prove that they know them.

Facebook has also taken steps to reduce risks to safety by providing children with safety messages when they are in danger of giving out personal information, restricting the ability of users to change their listed ages, acting more aggressively to remove inappropriate and hazardous content, and ensuring that third-party vendors adhere to Facebook's safety and privacy guidelines.[51] It further prevents access to a range of listed pornographic sites and the creation of any Facebook groups or pages that violate the company's terms and conditions, including incest, paedophilia, cyber bullying and others. Profiles of individuals who do not adhere to Facebook's terms and conditions are deleted. Facebook has deleted at least 100 registered sex offenders from its

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system.[52] Safety tips are also shared on the site and reporting mechanisms have been improved.

These technological measures are an excellent step in improving the safety of young users, but they are not foolproof. ICTs have more work to do to create safe online spaces.

Educational responses

A particular concern raised in the literature both internationally and locally is that most young people have the ability to be online without any adult supervision or monitoring of the websites that are accessed.[53] Even where supervision is available, young people's technological sophistication means that they often know how to sidestep content filters and delete histories, which indicate the websites they have accessed.[54]

The South African Film and Publication Board has stated that parental control is a major component in ensuring that children are not exposed to cyber violence.[55] Unfortunately, most parents are unable to supervise their children due to a lack of knowledge about technologies and the dangers they pose. Moreover, there are currently no structures in place that parents can refer to when they become aware of cyber bullying. These issues are reflected in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University study: 37% of young people surveyed had access to the internet in the privacy of their bedrooms; 63% did not have to ask permission before accessing the internet; and more than half (54%) were not supervised when using the internet.[56]

Low parental supervision and monitoring of internet use is an issue internationally as well. A study in the US found that 41% of young people do not share information with their parents about where they go and what they do online, and a quarter (26%) said their parents would be concerned if they were aware of what they did on the internet. In New Zealand, over half of primary school learners (52%) reported hardly ever being controlled when using the internet at home.[57]

Interestingly, perceptions relating to the presence of supervision and monitoring differ greatly between children and parents. A study shows that two-thirds (66%) of high school students reported that parents provide no supervision of their internet activities, while only 7% of parents reported that they provide no supervision.[58] This is an indication that parents believe they are providing some monitoring of internet use; however, the high proportion of young people perceiving this supervision to be absent shows that parental awareness and knowledge of technology is lacking.

A lack of awareness among adults means that they are unable to take precautions on behalf of children, who are also largely unaware of the risks in electronic media. This results in a lack of parental control due to inadequate education about online safety and prevents children from taking charge of their own safety. Awareness campaigns and safety programmes are therefore important to make both children and adults aware of the potential threats and how to minimise them. One such campaign, the Girls' Net 'Keep your chats exactly that', was launched in Johannesburg on 15 May 2009. The aim was to prevent young people, especially girls, from becoming victims of cyber violence and harassment by raising awareness, disseminating information and

A SURVEY IN THE US OF INTERNET AND AT-RISK BEHAVIOURS FOUND THAT:

- 25% of parents believe their children know more about computer technology than they do, while 14% believe they know the same about computers as their children
- Parents are generally aware of filtering, blocking and information security software, but only 30% of parents surveyed reported that they use this software
- 14% of parents have caught their children doing something with a computer device that they should not have been doing

Source: McQuade SC & Sampat N, Survey of Internet and At-risk behaviours. Report of the Rochester Institute of Technology, 2008.

promoting the use of ICTs for positive social participation.[59] The campaign further calls for more engagement with adults, who can help encourage the responsible use of ICTs and address problems when they occur.

Rather than prohibiting the use of electronic media or merely supervising their use, adults need to work towards empowering young people in their use of such technology so that they can take precautions and keep themselves safe online.[60] The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Institute for ICT Advancement also holds a series of targeted educational and awareness programmes for children, parents and educators as part of its project.

Several interventions in the US were evaluated to assess their effectiveness in increasing internet safety knowledge and behaviour. These include the i-Safe cyber safety programme, the 'Missing' cyber safety programme and an in-school cyber bullying intervention (HAHASO). The i-Safe project in the US provides community outreach and educational programme initiatives designed to inform individuals and communities about online safety. It strives to empower young people of all ages to make their internet experiences safe and responsible by teaching them how to avoid dangerous and inappropriate online behaviour. In addition to teaching children directly, it is also targeted at parents, educators, community leaders and law enforcement agencies.[61]

An evaluation of the project found that young people displayed increased knowledge of internet safety. They were more aware of how to manage online risks, including ways of identifying sexual predators and risks related to the divulging of personal information. They were also more likely to discuss their knowledge with friends and siblings.[62] However, the evaluation also found that the young people who participated in the project did not utilise their newfound knowledge on a practical level; they were not found to be less likely to engage in inappropriate behaviour online or to provide strangers with personal information (although they did say they would wait longer to give out such information).[63]

The 'Missing' cyber safety programme is a multimedia game designed for children aged 11 to 15 years old. It presents the story of an adolescent boy who meets a sexual predator online and is lured away from his home. The game-based software programme, based on a true story, involves taking on the role of a detective to piece together what happened by searching through chat room conversations between the teenager and the predator, as well as other clues, in order to locate him and reunite him with his family. The game teaches children about internet safety in a fun and positive manner and is designed for use in a classroom setting.[64]

In June 2011, a game aimed at younger children was launched on America's National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children's popular child-focused internet safety website during that country's Internet Safety Month.[65] The game, called 'Tad's Profile Panic', is aimed at children aged 8 to 12 years and teaches them about what information should be kept private in online profiles. The aim of the game is to help the game's character, Tad, edit his profile information. The game was developed to educate children before they reach adolescence, a time when their use of social networking increases. The website is popular in the US and attracted nearly half a million children between 2010 and 2011.[66]

Interactive media is a crucial way of engaging children in serious issues that affect them. However, similar to the i-Safe programme, an evaluation of the 'Missing' game found that it did not significantly alter internet-related safety attitudes or the likelihood of posting or sharing personal information. Furthermore, youths who received the intervention were not significantly less likely to participate in online spaces such as chat rooms or to email strangers.[67] Older children may already have certain online habits and behaviours that make them reluctant to put their knowledge into practice.

Another major intervention, the in-school cyber bullying intervention (HAHASO), also did not change the number of reported cyber bullying incidences experienced by

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Schools further provide the ideal entry point for prevention of violence since they have the potential to reach the homes of the learners they teach and access parents both directly (through holding meetings) or indirectly (through educating children).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS

There is limited literature about the success of campaigns targeted specifically at cyber violence and online safety. However, analyses into prevention campaigns in various fields such as alcohol abuse, traffic safety and school drop-out have allowed for general characteristics of successful approaches to be identified, which can be considered in the development of interventions for cyber safety. According to the analysis by Luna and Finkelhor, interventions tend to be successful when:

- they are grounded in a theoretical framework
- they focus on concrete skills development
- they consist of different components that take into account different target audiences (e.g. parents, teachers, pupils)
- interactive instructional strategies are applied
- the approach considers the individual and/or small groups in the target audience
- the training is implemented in a comprehensive way
- the intervention exceeds about 20 hours of involvement of the target audience

Campaigns have also been found to work best when they are targeted at early age groups (9 to 12 years) and consider factors such as gender in the programme development. Unsuccessful campaigns have been found to be limited to the transmission of knowledge as opposed to behaviour change, when the campaign is based on inducing fear, and when the focus is limited to changing attitudes and has an approach that is too general.

Source: Luna R & Finkelhor D, School-based prevention programs: Lessons for child victimisation prevention. Unpublished manuscript. Durham, NH: Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire, 1998. As cited in Valcke M, Schellens T, Van Keer H & Gerrarts M, Primary school children's safe and unsafe use of the Internet at home and at school: An exploratory study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2006. Available online: http://users.ugent.be/~mvalcke/CV/vecits.pdf [accessed 13 January 2012].

the learners.[68] This highlights the challenge in translating children's knowledge into practical, safer online behaviours. Interventions therefore need to be developed that go beyond awareness raising to interventions that specifically place emphasis on reducing risky online behaviours.[69]

A whole-school approach to cyber bullying prevention

Educators also have a major part to play in teaching children about the dangers of internet use, particularly since the statistics indicate that cyber bullying occurs both in the home and school contexts. According to South Africa's Film and Publication Board, just over a half of educators (53%) had discussed internet usage with their learners at school.[70] While schools by no means hold the sole responsibility for educating children about internet safety, they are considered an important role player to counter the potential negative effects of internet use because children spend a considerable amount of time in this setting. Schools further provide the ideal entry point for prevention of violence since they have the potential to reach the homes of the learners they teach and access parents both directly (through holding meetings) or indirectly (through educating children). In this way schools are able to have an impact on the communities in which they are situated.

In line with the need for a comprehensive approach to cyber violence, a whole-school approach in the educational setting is based on the assumption that bullying is a systematic problem and that interventions need to be directed at the entire school context, including learners, educators, principals, parents, school governing bodies and external school members, which include provincial, district and national government, rather than just individual victims and bullies.[71] By intervening in all areas of the school community, one is able to change beliefs, behaviours and social norms, and to create a supportive and trusting school environment that has access to external support structures.

Whole-school approaches designed to address traditional forms of bullying can help to shed light on cyber bullying behaviours and can be adapted to suit this new context.

The first comprehensive whole-school intervention, the 1993 Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, was implemented on a large scale and was premised on the following components:

Awareness

All members of the school community must be made aware of what cyber bullying is and how they should respond to it. This is especially important in the light of:

- poor parental knowledge and subsequent control of children's ICT use; and
- children's tendency to conceptualise online aggression as 'drama' rather than bullying or violence.

The issue needs to be described and discussed in detail so that everyone understands and has a shared idea of what constitutes cyber violence and the importance of addressing it, particularly due to the grave implications cyber bullying can have on individuals.

Curricular activities are important in instilling anti-bullying attitudes among learners and assisting them in developing pro-social conflict-resolution skills. Children should be engaging with these important issues in the classroom. This will allow a climate of empathy and respect to be established, both in the classroom and in the school in general. Life Orientation classes provide a perfect opportunity to add elements of cyber bullying and 'netiquette' into the formal curriculum.

Policy

Codes of conduct and other school policies that address cyber bullying need to be drawn up and communicated to all members of the school community. There needs to be a policy in place that is not only implemented but consistently enforced, and there need to be appropriate consequences relating to cyber bullying. This will indicate that the issue is taken seriously and will not be tolerated, and each member of the school community will be held accountable for their behaviour.

The Department of Basic Education provides guidelines on e-safety in schools and calls for a safe school committee to be formed to manage e-safety, with the function of developing, implementing and

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The Department of Basic Education's 2010 draft guidelines on e-safety suggest that a safe school committee be formed in each school to manage e-safety. The committee would comprise the following members:

- School management
- Network administrator
- IT teacher
- Teacher-librarian/counsellor/Life Orientation teacher
- School governing body representative
- Member of the local police service
- Learner representative
- Other appropriate specialists

The draft guidelines on e-safety also suggest that an acceptable use policy covers the following:

- The school's responsibility and rights towards ICT use
- The learner's responsibility and rights towards ICT use
- The parent/guardian's responsibility and rights towards ICT use
- The consequences if the policy is not adhered to

Source: Department of Basic Education, Guidelines on e-safety in schools: Educating towards responsible, accountable and ethical use of ICT in education. Draft guidelines, South Africa, 2010.

A whole-school approach is advantageous as it provides a framework of action that can be drawn on when incidents are reported.

enforcing an acceptable use policy for ICTs in the school environment.[72] This policy would not only outline the responsible use of such technology but would also outline the consequences of being in breach of the policy for both learners and school staff.

The policy needs to be linked to the existing code of conduct in each school. The guidelines further suggest that all learners, parents and educators sign the policy, and that the policy is made visible throughout the school. It is also considered important that policies be values-based rather than rules-based.

Monitoring and accountability

The acceptable use policy in the school outlines the responsibilities and rights of each member of the school community to ensure that ICTs are used appropriately and safely. For example, schools are responsible for ensuring that policies are in place so that ICTs are used positively to enhance the learning environment, educators are responsible for monitoring the use of ICTs and providing guidance and advice on how to deal with cyber bullying, and learners are responsible for ensuring that their use of ICTs is in line with school policy.

In addition, parents are responsible for monitoring their child's use of ICTs both in and out of the home, which requires parents to be educated in order to be able to supervise their children effectively.

Government departments at provincial, district and national level have an important role to play in monitoring schools and their implementation of the various policies. Communication between school members results in active collaboration and a coordinated approach to the problem.

The consequences of being in breach of school policy need to be adjusted according to the severity of the incident and the harm caused.

In addition, individualised interventions for children affected by cyber bullying, either as victims or as bullies, need to be developed to resolve conflict and mitigate negative consequences that may result.

A whole-school approach is advantageous as it provides a framework of action that can be drawn on when incidents are reported. It further creates a systematic intervention that involves the cooperation of all relevant role players and raises awareness about the importance placed on addressing this issue.

In addition, children will be a lot more confident in reporting incidents when they know that they will be supported and that the issue will be dealt with efficiently.

Conclusion

Cyber bullying can have severe consequences for children's well-being and development. While there are currently no empirically based responses to the issue, several successful interventions on related topics, such as traditional bullying, help to shed light on possible ways of addressing the issue. What becomes apparent is the need for integrated, evidence-based and child-centred approaches that take into account the everyday lived experiences of South African children and youth as they use ICTs.

For the most part, young people are aware of the risks and dangers associated with their online use of communication tools. The information that is lacking, and should be explored, is how young people negotiate these online risks and dangers. Children and youth's voices and qualitative experiences are largely missing in the development of effective online safety strategies. Such evidence is fundamental to the development of empirically based prevention strategies to address online violence.

While important, one cannot merely rely on technological measures to keep children safe. Instead, technological measures need to be utilised in conjunction with educational responses that focus on educating not only learners, but parents, educators and principals too, on the risks of electronic media and the importance of supervision. Since schools are an important context in which cyber bullying can occur, a comprehensive methodology is needed that will create a coordinated and collaborative

approach between the different members of the school community.

A whole-school approach to cyber bullying – one such example of a comprehensive prevention methodology – has three basic components. First, it will educate learners, parents and school staff, as well as help to create a change in the tolerance and acceptance of this form of bullying. Second, the issue of cyber bullying will be incorporated into the curriculum, which will equip at-risk learners to handle situations of cyber bullying and inform them of the mechanisms in place to support them.

It will also outline clear consequences for bullies and hold each individual accountable for their role in addressing cyber bullying. Finally, specialised interventions for victims and bullies will be developed for children in the school context.

These three components are essential in dealing with the issue holistically. It is important to acknowledge the problem of cyber bullying for children in South Africa and to be aware of the impact it can have on them, especially since the situation is only likely to get worse as technology evolves.

Such partnerships between parents and schools can only yield positive benefits for young people's online safety.

We need to start engaging more with young people and discussing the ways they experience online violence, and how they can negotiate these online spaces and prevent online victimisation.

Only then will we be able to better ensure that young people profit from the many benefits that technology does bring, while minimising the potential for harm.

Technological measures need to be utilised in conjunction with educational responses that focus on educating not only learners, but parents, educators and principals too, on the risks of electronic media and the importance of supervision.

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CJCP mission

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) is dedicated to developing, informing and promoting innovative evidence-based crime prevention focused on the groups identified as being vulnerable to victimisation or offending. The CJCP does this by:

- conducting rigorous research into issues of relevance to policy makers, public service officials, development partners and crime prevention practitioners;
- facilitating the implementation of crime prevention projects;
- providing sector-specific and accredited training in crime prevention for policy makers, public sector officials and non-governmental organisation practitioners; and
- disseminating the results of its research and lessons learned to relevant audiences.

About this paper

The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ITCs) over the past few years has altered our social environments and has in many ways directed our social interactions. Young people lead the way in the daily use of ICT tools. Although beneficial, ICTs have inadvertently opened up new avenues for violence and victimisation against the country's most vulnerable, i.e. children and youth.

While there is a dearth of literature on the topic, this paper draws on the data available to demonstrate the need for an evidence-based child-centred approach that takes into consideration children's everyday lived experiences in their use of ICTs to safe-guard them against online dangers.

In response to the negative effects of cyber aggression the ICT industry has been compelled to develop and implement strategies to protect young users. Blocking and filtering software is one of the primary means developed to keep children from accessing harmful content online. While of paramount importance, the sole reliance on this software is insufficient in addressing the problem.

The paper argues for schools as an important entry point in cyber bullying prevention since they provide the ideal context in which to bring together technological measures as well as education awareness initiatives involving most of the role players responsible for protecting children and youth.

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