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YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES ON CYBERBULLYING: WHAT CAN AGE COMPARISONS TELL US?

SAIMA TARAPDAR AND PROFESSOR MARY KELLETT NOVEMBER 2011

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Young People's Voices on Cyberbullying:
What Can Age Comparisons Tell Us?

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ABOUT THE DIANA AWARD

The Diana Award was founded in 1999 by the UK Government to act as a lasting legacy to the late Princess Diana's belief in the power of young people to change the world. We have given 36,000 young people from across the UK special recognition through our award schemes and encourage these exceptional young people to continue building a better society for all. Our vision is to promote a culture that celebrates young people from all sections of society who have made a selfless contribution to their communities in the UK and internationally.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTRE, OPEN UNIVERSITY

The Children's Research Centre (CRC) at the Open University was established in 2003 to empower children and young people as active researchers. The CRC recognises that children and young people are experts on their own lives, values their perspectives and promotes their voice by supporting them to carry out research on topics they identify. The CRC supports a variety of outreach programmes in schools and community organisations. Child-led research makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on childhoods. The CRC hosts more than 120 original research studies by children and young people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
PART 1 INTRODUCTION	10
Aim of the study	10
Policy context	10
How the research was carried out	12
How terms are used in this report	13
Structure of the report	13
PART 2 THE APPROACH TO THE STUDY	14
Why study cyberbullying?	14
Situating this work	14
Approach and research methods	14
PART 3 FINDINGS	18
1.1 Prevalence and frequency of cyberbullying	18
1.2 The method of cyberbullying	20
2.1 Location and timing of cyberbullying	22
2.2 Response to being or seeing cyberbullying	24
2.3 Anticipated hopes and fears	25
PART 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	30



FOREWORD

The Diana Award commissioned this research in response to our continuing concern that young people across the country were left vulnerable to cyberbullying and needed a platform to voice these anxieties. This report provides valuable insight into the experiences of victims, witnesses and active people championing good practices. We believe that young people such as our Anti-Bullying Ambassadors should recommend ways to overcome bullying.

The clear message from this report is that although cyberbullying is a comparatively new method of bullying, it continues to have devastating consequences on those who are its recipients. It is vital that training and skills development are given to young people so that they can continue to spearhead anti-bullying campaigns and initiatives within their communities. We would also urge Government and Funders to ring-fence funds for anti-bullying work in the community and to create central systems of resources for cross-sector sharing and learning with schools, young people and communities.

Bullying is endemic but we believe that in supporting and safeguarding our young people, they will create initiatives and practice that will build a society in which we would all like to live.

In our ongoing work of the Award, particularly through the Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassadors Programme, young people have shown they have the tools, enthusiasm and skills to work together and create a network committed to overcoming cyberbullying practice in our communities.

We are at a time when young people are fluent in and accomplished at using technology than ever before, with levels of understanding surpassing most adults today. This knowledge may put a larger number of young people at jeopardy but tapped into, can also keep them safe. This report serves as a timely reminder to listen to their voices, appreciate the barriers they face and how they want to overcome it, whilst challenging us - funders, providers, teachers, parents and young people - to do more.



Maggie Turner, OBE
Chief Executive, Diana Award



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The study was commissioned by the Diana Award, with support from the Children's Research Centre, Open University. It draws on materials designed and collected with a youth research steering group and in total encompassed the views of 1512 young people in England (1490 pupils who completed the surveys and 22 who co-designed the research).

Its aims were to:

- Provide a nuanced understanding of the nature and prevalence of cyberbullying;
- Contribute to the body of knowledge and discourse about effective ways of strengthening response and prevention.

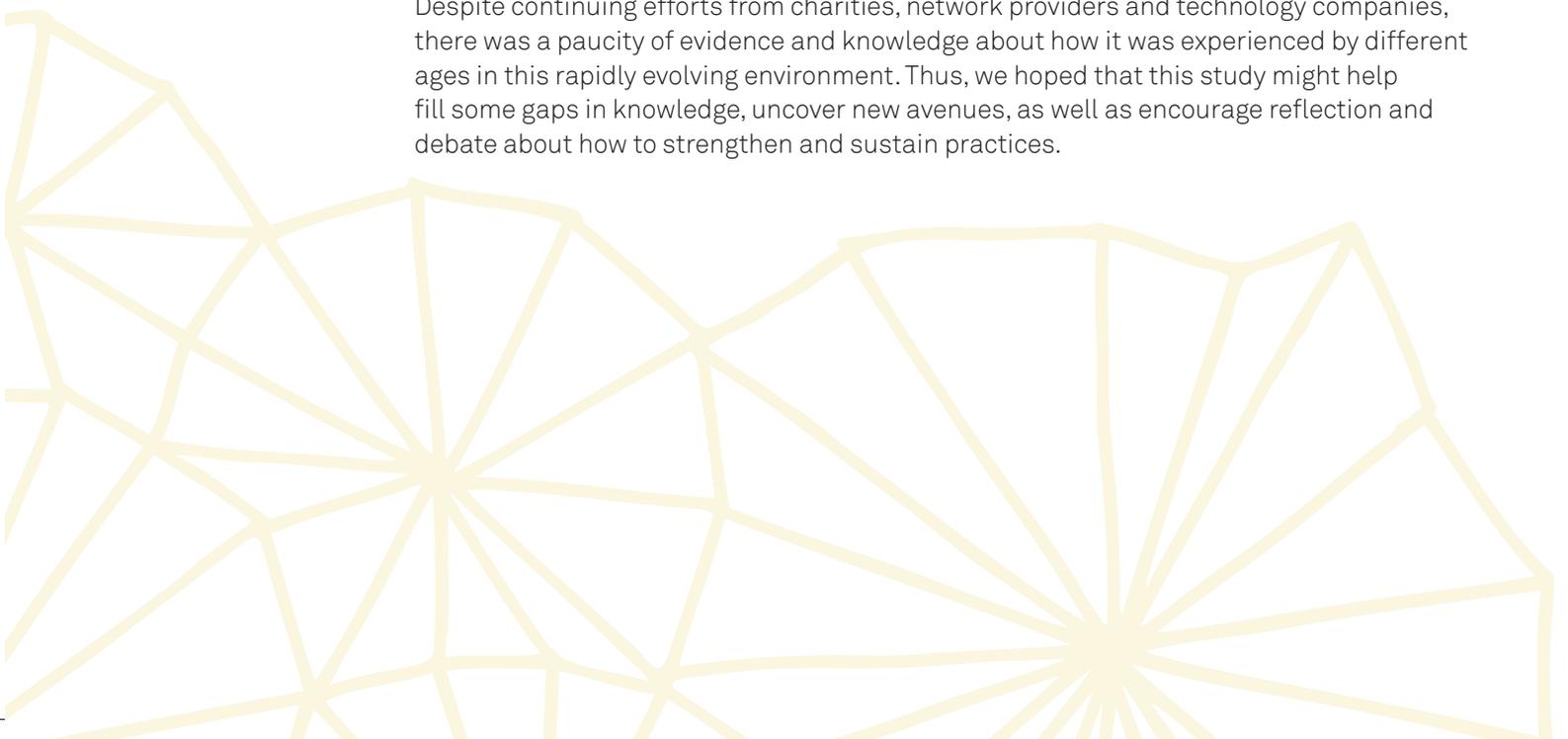
The study, one of the largest of its kind, was carried out from September 2009 to July 2011 and split into three parts. The first was a large postal survey completed by 1282 pupils which compared responses of younger youth (Year 8 pupils aged 12-13 years) and older youth (Year 10 pupils aged 14-15 years), to ascertain whether seemingly narrow ages had a different impact on cyberbullying experiences and opinions. The second consisted of two online surveys from 177 Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassadors aged 12 to 16 years, to shed light on effective preventative practices. Four focus groups completed the third part, with 31 young people aged 12 to 16 years who provided insight on the emergent findings and recommendations.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In recent years, the last two successive UK governments made a strong commitment to tackle bullying. By engaging with schools, colleges and youth groups, attempts were made to give young people control over the type of intervention. In England, this commitment increased under the New Labour government's agenda to prevent and respond to cyberbullying.

While this was not superseded by the coalition government, research from the UK and elsewhere uncovered its continuing growth, differences in victimisation based on age, gender or race and the scale of young people's proficiency in technology and exposure to harm, often surpassing the speed of response and intervention.

Despite continuing efforts from charities, network providers and technology companies, there was a paucity of evidence and knowledge about how it was experienced by different ages in this rapidly evolving environment. Thus, we hoped that this study might help fill some gaps in knowledge, uncover new avenues, as well as encourage reflection and debate about how to strengthen and sustain practices.



KEY FINDINGS

1. Understanding the nature and prevalence of cyberbullying

1.1 Prevalence and frequency

The research identified a significant number of young people affected by cyberbullying, as victims and witnesses, and experienced mostly in a non-persistent manner. Although the persistency of cyberbullying did not differ by age, prevalence levels did, with a greater number of older youth at risk compared to younger youth.

- Cyberbullying affected 38% of young people either as victims or witnesses and was experienced mostly at irregular intervals.
- There were no measurable differences when compared across regions in England - therefore no regional differences.

1.2 Method of cyberbullying

The shape and path of cyberbullying was complex. The accessibility and the fashionable aspects of device were contributing factors in the form of cyberbullying and multiplicity of devices used. Abusive emails and harassing phone calls were equally the most popular, as was using one method. Sources of under reporting and under recording were due to the subtle nature of cyberbullying (a greater issue for younger youth), and general acceptance of some forms of bullying behaviour as just banter. Older youth, as before, experienced a greater exposure to all forms of cyberbullying, as well as its more multiple forms and aggressive manner, particularly with the erection of hate websites.

- 'Abusive emails' (26%) was the most prominent method of cyberbullying, followed closely by 'abusive texts' (24%) and 'prank and silent calls' (19%).
- 52% of young people were bullied with two or more forms of technology.
- Older youth experienced higher levels of cyberbullying across the more 'creative' and aggressive categories e.g. hate websites and happy slapping.
- Younger youth experienced higher levels of cyberbullying across the traditional modes e.g. abusive emails and texts.

2. Effective ways of strengthening response and prevention

2.1 Location and timing of cyberbullying

Young people's attitudes highlighted the importance of a whole-school and multi-tiered approach. The majority felt the home (referring to time spent away from the school rather than source of harm) was the location of cyberbullying, although older youth were more at risk of its omnipresent nature fearing exposure within the school and home. Schools were generally seen as effective vehicles for change, due to the acquisition of skills and tips on self protection and opportunities to participate in anti-bullying initiatives. The home was uncovered as the location of a shortcoming of knowledge; young people required parents to be more active and digitally competent and internet providers to build support and information around parents to help them in this task.

- A total of 99% felt 'safe and secure' at school.
- 94% felt the school was the most effective place for education and deterrence.
- 50% of respondents felt cyberbullying persisted within the wider community
- The majority, 56% felt that it was experienced within the home and 15% whilst travelling.
- 8% more younger youth felt it occurred at home compared to older youth.

2.2 Response to being or seeing cyberbullying

There was huge scope for greater intervention, although this was inhibited by the reluctance and fear of disclosing incidences - a total of 28% had not informed anyone of their experience. Of those who did confide in someone, they chose to inform friends and family. This differed by age, with older youth more inclined to inform friends and agencies such as police, internet providers and helplines, whilst younger youth relied on parents and family surroundings.

- 72% talked to someone. Of those who sought direct assistance from familiar people; 'friends' (23%) were the most trusted, followed by 'parents' (22%) and 'teachers' (11%).
- Younger youth relied on parents followed by friends (27% and 23% respectively).
- Older youth relied on friends followed by parents (23% and 18% respectively).
- 62% of young people knew how to save evidence, but only 47% actually saved evidence when they were cyberbullied.

2.3 Anticipated hopes and fears

There was an ambivalence of the effectiveness of current intervention with 54% of young people satisfied, but 78% fearing levels would increase due to the evolving nature of technology. Their at risk status increased with high technology use, since 90% of young people used a mobile phone and 91% accessed the internet on a daily basis. Unsurprisingly, older youth had a higher prevalence of use across all forms of technology and displayed higher levels of fear that it would increase (81% compared to 74% for younger youth).

CONCLUSIONS

Providing effective responses to cyberbullying required a combination of different approaches from young people, schools and educational settings, network providers and technology companies, charities as well as the government. The spotlight from recent research and campaigns highlighted some of the good practices as well as gaps. In this study, we found that age mattered. An obvious assumption was that opposite ends of school life, either primary and secondary school or contrasting ends within each period resulted in different behaviours. This study showed how young people in even smaller and tighter age ranges, within seemingly similar periods, emitted different behaviours and responses, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of a 'one-size-fits-all' response.

Location also mattered. Schools provided huge support for young people as victims but also as champions spearheading youth-led initiatives and opportunities to be involved in problem-solving discussions. The home, instead, was uncovered as a location of cyberbullying, as well as presenting a shortcoming of knowledge from parents. Young people wanted to take control, be more responsible, but wanted help doing so. They found it more difficult to protect themselves than access technology and avenues to abuse it.

Young people in this study generally acknowledged the difficulties of overcoming this, and although seeing current progress in a positive light, had an appetite to do more. They valued the close relationships and knowledge exchange with different sectors, helping them be better placed to make a difference, rather part of the problem. In thinking about the further development of approaches, the following four areas were deemed to benefit from further attention:

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a better understanding:

- Funding and planning of programmes and research that recognise age differences as shaping the experience and perception of risk.
- Time and resources for the formation and management of initiatives and partnerships that include or are led by young people.

Building capacity and sustainability:

- Charities and private sector organisations supported to provide leadership training and skills development for young people to spearhead campaigns and initiatives.
- Schools to gain access to more capital and investment to become a hub for knowledge exchange.
- Funders to ring-fence funds for sustained anti-bullying work within communities to counter high levels of bullying, particularly cyberbullying.

Maintaining and sharing good practices:

- Charities and private sector organisations to engage in information exchanges with young people, parents and each other to develop good practices.
- Schools to continue to roll out student-led initiatives and provide formal platforms for young people.
- Schools to share the findings of this report to members of staff.
- Government led commitment to create one central anti-bullying resource and best available practice for all parents and adults working with young people, as well as young people themselves.

Providing direct protection:

- All sectors to educate young people and parents on becoming responsible consumers.
- Internet, mobile phone and technology companies to provide continuing, visible and accessible cyber safeguards that engage with parents and young people in their design and appeal. This may mean improved safety features, more regulation, policies and codes of conduct.
- Parents to gain skills and access information on how to help their children be responsible and safe users online.
- Young people to share the responsibility to be safe online.
- Schools to continue with both rehabilitative and sanction-based approaches, whilst also deepening education programmes.
- Central government to hold industries, schools, colleges and youth organisations to account, implementing and regularly reviewing cyber bullying policies. In some cases, to encourage signatories to good practice agreements and self regulation.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the findings from a youth participatory research project about cyberbullying, with a particular focus on age comparisons. The study draws on material designed and collected by a youth research steering group, compiled from each of the previous Government Office Regions in England. It sheds light on young people's experiences, responses and attitudes towards cyberbullying, with recommendations on strengthening policy and practices across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The research was commissioned by and developed with the Diana Award, whose vision it is to promote a culture that encourages and celebrates young people who make a selfless and positive contribution to their communities. They aim, amongst other things, to reduce bullying in communities and to create a platform for young people to be listened to. The recently developed Anti-Bullying Ambassadors Programme reflects these values, with 2000 Ambassadors aged between seven to 16 years championing and spearheading good practices in research, initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns in schools across the UK.

The research, carried out from September 2009 to July 2011, formed one strand of this remit as a response to the dearth of youth participatory action research on cyberbullying. It had two aims:

- To provide a nuanced understanding of the nature and prevalence of cyberbullying;
- To contribute to the body of knowledge and discourse about effective ways of strengthening response and prevention.

Overall project management was led by Saima Tarapdar, with support from Professor Mary Kellett. They worked with a youth research steering and working group to shape the design and analysis of the research data.

POLICY CONTEXT

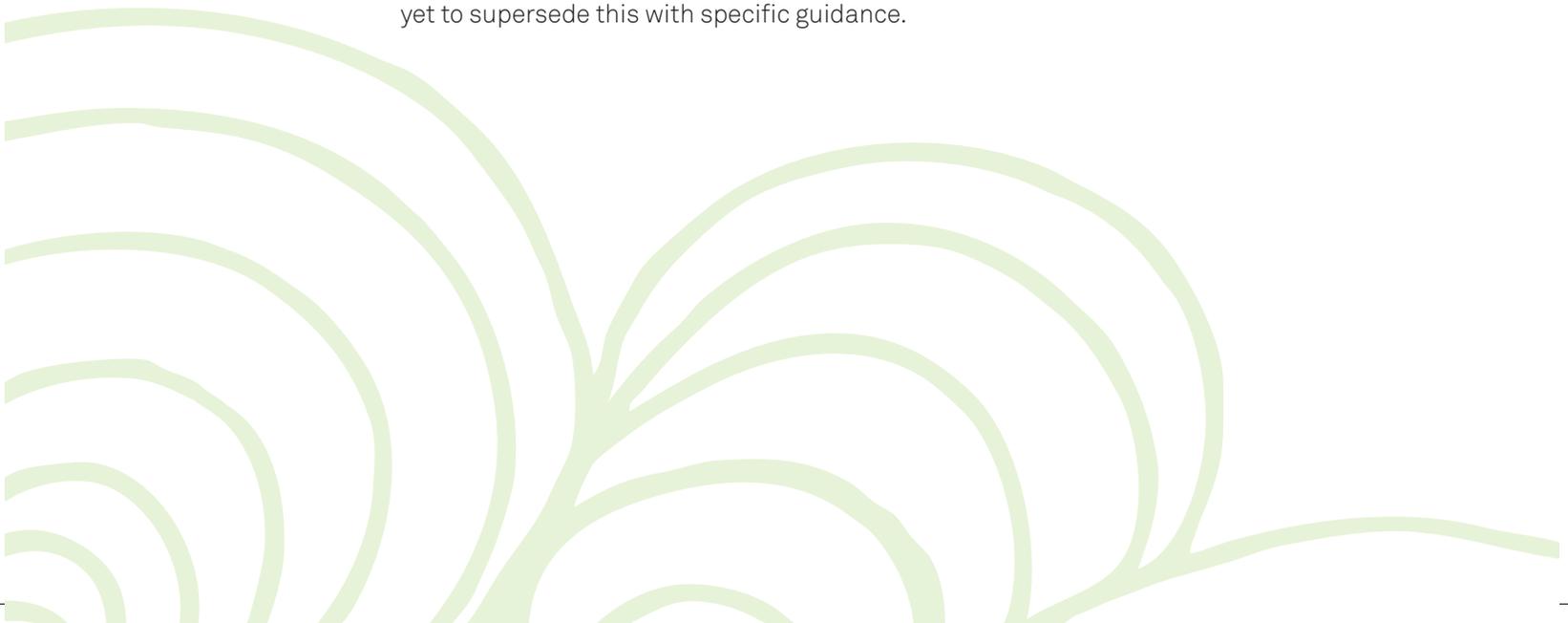
Tackling bullying has been an important policy issue for New Labour and the current coalition government. In England, the onus has been on schools, youth groups and local authorities to provide protection to young people. All schools are required to have and design anti-bullying policies under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2003. This has created a marked shift in perception and approach of safeguarding children and young people, seeing schools and youth groups adopt a variety of proactive approaches. Many have established self help groups, peer counselling and restorative justice schemes and supported inter-agency partnerships and collaborations with the purchase of support, resources and training from the private and voluntary sector (Sullivan, 2000).



Under the coalition government, the vehicle for safeguarding against bullying has remained the same, with an emphasis on prioritising the elimination of prejudice-based bullying as a step towards eliminating discrimination under the new Public Sector Equality Duty (Department for Education, 2011a). In addition, as part of delivering key national priorities for children, young people and families (Department for Education, 2010), fostering and maintaining partnerships with the voluntary and community sector are integral to creating sustainable change (Government Equality Office, 2010). Part of this 'wrap-around' approach has also been the inclusion of coordinated action with statutory services such as the police and the local authority's anti-social behaviour coordinator when reporting or dealing with serious incidences (Department for Education, 2011b).

More broadly, as an act on its own, cyberbullying is not yet a specific criminal offence in UK law, although it is subject to laws governing cyber stalking and menacing and threatening communications. Criminal laws such as the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, may apply in terms of harassment or threatening behaviour. Where persistent harassment on a mobile phone is concerned, the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Telecoms Act (1984) makes it a criminal offence to make anonymous or abusive calls. Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 and the Public Order Act 1986 also makes it a criminal offence to send offensive messages through public electronic communications networks, perhaps relevant to a school setting. The ambiguity of the boundaries between criminal and deviant acts are made all the more difficult and controversial with young people, when incidences are not captured by formal authorities or are accepted as falling under the remit of school discipline.

Nonetheless, steps have been taken to implement regulations and initiatives that both directly and indirectly seek to prevent cyberbullying and deal with its effects within a pedagogical setting. Most recently, schools have been given extended powers to identify, prevent and tackle all forms of bullying with a strong emphasis on disciplining behaviour, and dealing with pupil bullying in the community (Department for Education, 2011a). Under the Education and Inspections Act (2006), head teachers have legal powers to regulate the conduct of pupils off-site, with further deterrent policies in the form of staff powers to confiscate mobile phones. Specific measures have been created under The Safe To Learn guidance (2009) and accompanying suite of resources, by the then Department for Children Schools and Families Cyberbullying Taskforce in partnership with ChildNet International - to raise awareness and educate children, parents, carers and youth workers about online dangers. The coalition government has been aware of the contribution that cyberbullying makes to overall bullying victimisation rates and the need to include parents in anti-bullying policies (Department for Education, 2011a) but have yet to supersede this with specific guidance.



From elsewhere, numerous charities and umbrella bodies have created their own materials, programmes and high profile awareness-raising campaigns which have been complemented by actions from the private sector. For example, members of the United Kingdom's Council for Child and Internet Safety (UKCCIS), a stakeholder group initially set up to deliver recommendations of the Byron Review (2008), and other and Corporate and Social Responsibility teams have collectively or individually signed agreements to tackle online grooming, inappropriate content and cyberbullying. This has been guided in England under the Home Office's 'Good practice guidance for the providers of interactive services for children' and more widely, the 'Safer social networking principles for the EU' which encourages corporate signatories to implement good practices of self regulating the age appropriateness of their services, access controls for adult content and awareness-raising campaigns for parents and children (European Commission, 2009).

Reflecting on these developing policy aspirations to tackle cyberbullying, it is evident that central and local governments, schools, the private sector, charities, parents and young people are contributors to change. In order to understand how it operates within specific dimensions and to move the debate and ideas forward, there is a continual need to explore and deconstruct cyberbullying.

HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CARRIED OUT

The study was carried out in seven stages:

- Review of the cyberbullying literature
- Facilitated training sessions with the youth research working group
- Ongoing facilitated meetings with the youth research steering group
- Large scale postal survey completed by 29 schools from within each of the previous nine regions in England
- Online surveys from the Anti-Bullying Ambassador schools across the country
- Focus groups with young people
- Participatory review of the material collected with the youth steering group and small advisory group.

Taken together, the findings in this report are based on:

- A large scale survey with 1282 responses from young people in secondary schools across England
- The secondary analysis of two online surveys with 177 responses from young people and 64 responses from teachers and support staff
- Four focus groups with 31 young people
- Documentary data from government records, research institutions, grey literature and policy reports.

HOW TERMS ARE USED IN THIS REPORT

In this report, terms are used in the following ways:

The focus of the report and age of interest is with young people, those aged 12 to 16 years old.

Cyberbullying refers to the bullying and harassment of others by means of digital technologies, with the intention to harm someone, both directly and indirectly. This includes a wide range of behaviours such as being recorded against one's will; verbal abuse, silent and malicious calls; blackmailing, embarrassing or humiliating someone on the internet and electronic media; and dissemination through GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) services.

Wellbeing refers to the quality of young people's lives in a broad and multi-dimensional sense which is inclusive of the domains of relationships, risk behaviours, educational and material aspects and subjective wellbeing.

The term survey and subsequent statistics refer to the main postal survey completed by 1282 young people, whilst the online survey refers to the secondary analysis of the more recent set of questionnaires completed by 177 young people. Participants are young people involved in the focus groups and respondents are to those who completed both surveys.

Quotations from young people are indicated in italics to illustrate the key themes and findings.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

In part two we describe the approach to the study and examine key research in this field. Part three sets out the findings from the surveys and focus groups, followed by conclusions and recommendations in part four.

PART 2: THE APPROACH TO THE STUDY

In this section, the nature and extent of cyberbullying will be covered, followed by a description of how the study was carried out including research questions, approach, method and analysis. It is important to note that the study focuses on cyberbullying from a victim perspective (direct or indirect) and not from the aggressor or perpetrator perspective.

WHY STUDY CYBERBULLYING?

Technological advances have opened the door to a new world in cyberspace which both benefits and endangers young people (Spears et al, 2008). Focus on the harm it causes has revealed how young people's wellbeing has become increasingly compromised with greater exposure to the risk of indecent behaviour; sharing of personal details and images with online contacts; stalking; sexual online contact and behaviour; online gambling; and cyberbullying (UNICEF, 2011).

Its dissimilarity to traditional bullying, by its nature and more infrequent experience, makes it more challenging to prevent. Recent studies on age and gender comparisons have indicated disproportionate experiences by those from an older age range and by females (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008). Age on its own is a large contributor to young people's wellbeing levels affecting the extent to which they are exposed to high risk behaviour, confide in adults and have the knowledge to seek assistance from formal channels (UNICEF, 2007). These differences need to be understood in order to provide the context of the societal changes (Stratham and Chase, 2010).

It also carries its own characteristics and qualities (Akbulut et al, 2010) related to the wide reach and the ability to be enacted at any time or place (Marilyn et al, 2009). It is controlled remotely, anonymously and assumed repetitively (Spears et al, 2008). At the other extreme, it has a potentially large audience and the ability to galvanise supporters over a short period of time, creating infinite and sometimes unintentional consequences in publicising the young person's victimisation status (Cross et al, 2009). All of these qualities make it an effective mechanism to bully (Coyne et al, 2009), leaving victims feeling anxious, frustrated, and helpless to respond as they struggle to recover from the large scale and irreversible negative effects (Chung et al, 2011). Perpetrators, on the other hand, are often left unidentifiable, living with limited fear of reprisal, having created a permanent digital mark (Hobbs, 2009). As a relatively new phenomenon, in its prevalence and form, it too becomes less easily identifiable by young people and adults. Adults have an unfamiliar grasp of the problem and young people are unable to identify themselves as victims and in some cases accept this behaviour as part of their peers' normative beliefs (Almeida et al, 2009).



Since the early twenty-first century, there has been much research, theory generation and policy responses from international and British research on the issue. Both have uncovered varying statistics of its scale but emit consistent messages of its existence. In recent European comparative data, focussing on online bullying, 8% of those in the UK were bullied, placing it sixth out of 25 countries, higher than Spain and France (Livingstone et al, 2011). In AVG's (2011) study, 20% of children were bullied online in the UK, the second country most at risk compared to other developed nations (AVG, 2011). Interestingly, recent studies in England have shown these to be an underestimation, with rates varying from 18.4% of 500 pupils aged 11 to 19 years in one study (O'Brien and Moules, 2010) to 31% of 695 pupils in another (Bryce, 2009). This is complicated further when taking into account the persistence of cyberbullying, with only 7.5% of 2094 young people aged 11 to 16 years cyberbullied (Cross et al, 2009), a figure closer to international comparisons.

SITUATING THIS WORK

The preceding discussion has shown the need for a nuanced exploration of the issues to complement the sparse literature on age comparisons on cyberbullying, despite it being a large contributing factor to overall wellbeing. By disaggregating age, additional knowledge is hoped to be generated to ascertain the extent to which this may influence young people's experiences, responses and attitudes and prevention.

At a practical level, there is the need to achieve a breadth and depth of analysis, given the complexities and discrepancies between studies in the design and measurement of its prevalence. Incorporating perspectives of numerous and diverse young people, representative of a cross-section of youth in England, is an important feature of this work. In terms of depth, it is important for the research to gain a richness of data, using youth-centred approaches to quantify the scale, form and fear surrounding response to it.

APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODS

Research aims and questions

For each of the two aims, the following research questions were devised:

1. Provide a nuanced understanding of the nature and prevalence of cyberbullying

- What can the research tell us about the experience of being cyberbullied, specifically prevalence and different types of cyberbullying?
- Is there a difference in experience amongst a comparison of different ages?

2. Contribute to the body of knowledge and the discourse about effective ways of strengthening response and prevention

- What can different attitudes, fears and reporting and recording patterns tell us about how to respond to cyberbullying?
- What do young people and Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassadors view as policy and practical responses across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors and their communities?



Methodology

The study was conducted between September 2009 and July 2011. Data collection focussed on three principle tasks: a large scale survey distributed to young people in two age ranges; the secondary analysis of two sets of online questionnaires with Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassadors and teachers of those schools; and four focus groups with young people. These methods are detailed below.

Youth steering group and working group

The research was about and by young people, 1512 in total, from each previous Government Office Regions in England. A key feature was the use of participatory action research approaches to incorporate the views of young people into the methodology, body of knowledge and outcomes. Previous research which has used this technique has found it achieved a better understanding amongst adults of young people's worlds (Kellett, 2005). This consisted of a youth research steering group of six young people aged 15 to 17 years as well as a wider working group of sixteen young people aged 15 to 21 years from charities such as Mencap, SCHOOLS OUT and the Young Anti-Bullying Alliance. A smaller advisory panel of two young people also acted as 'critical friends' in the production of the final report. All received training from the Children's Research Centre at the Open University in research techniques. They helped to identify key areas for investigation, complemented by desk-based research, worked on questionnaire design and ideas (piloted to 60 young people), created accessible resources for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, helped recruit schools, and took part in a participatory analysis day of interim findings.

Survey of young people with age comparisons

It was important to survey a representative cross-section of young people to capture the various types of cyberbullying. The main postal survey was conducted from September 2009 to January 2010, with hard copies of questionnaires distributed to 45 schools on the Diana Award database, stratified into the nine regions in England and by age; Year 8 and Year 10 pupils (aged 12 to 13 years and 14 to 15 years respectively). This was because the main focus of analysis sought to ascertain whether or not there were differences in experience between older and younger youth using proxy comparative measures. In total, 1282 questionnaires were returned from 29 schools, and cleaned, entered and analysed using SPSS. Of this, 56% of respondents were male and 44% female with equal responses from both age groups. The schools were located in a variety of locations from urban, rural and suburban areas to ensure representation of different types of place and geography. Respondents replied in relatively equal proportions from each region, grouped into the following:

- 38% from the North (North East and North West)
- 37% from the South (South East, South West and Greater London)
- 26% from the middle England (East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England).

Findings discussed and referenced in the report were only those where patterns of association between the different age groups were statistically significant using Chi-Square tests of comparison.

Secondary analysis of two online surveys

In order to triangulate these experiences, findings were consolidated against the secondary analysis of two online surveys distributed to young people aged between 12 to 16 years and teachers over the period of three months from May 2011 to July 2011 as part of the Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassadors Programme. In total, 177 online questionnaires were returned from young people in 121 schools, and 64 questionnaires from heads of years, learning mentors, teachers and Directors of Learning.

Focus groups

Surveys, theoretical frameworks and guides were designed in line with two desk-based reviews conducted in August 2009 and July 2011 and subsequently analysed with the aid of four focus groups in secondary schools in London. Thirty one young people participated; 17 males and 14 females aged between 12 to 16 years. Schools sampled were located in a mixture of inner city and more sparsely populated areas.

Ethics

The research was conducted within a carefully considered ethical framework, guided by the MRS code of conduct (MRS, 2006) and within Open University and the Diana Award's safeguarding procedures. Postal questionnaires were designed to be anonymous and sensitive to the language needs and feelings, to avoid distressing respondents when the environment of its completion could not be controlled. Given the nature of the study, each questionnaire included details of charities and helplines for those seeking further information and support. For all youth participants and gatekeepers, informed consent was gained through the provision of an information sheet clarifying the nature and intentions. Great care was taken to coordinate schedules with the steering and working groups, who were not obliged to maintain continual commitment, despite doing so. All young people were also reminded of adherence to confidentiality protocol and sensitive data handling and management.

PART 3: FINDINGS

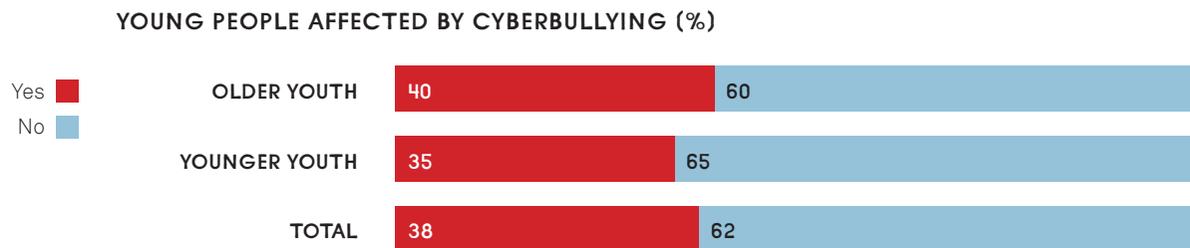
In part three, the findings from the study are set out in correspondence with each research aim under the following headings: the prevalence and frequency of cyberbullying; the method of cyberbullying; location and timing of cyberbullying; responses to being or seeing cyberbullying; and anticipated hopes and fears.

I. TO PROVIDE A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING

The first part details the broad experience of victims, which asserts that age differences have a bearing on the scale and type of 'real' experiences.

I.1 PREVALENCE AND FREQUENCY OF CYBERBULLYING

Figure 1. 38% of young people were exposed to cyberbullying as victims or as witnesses (n=1282)

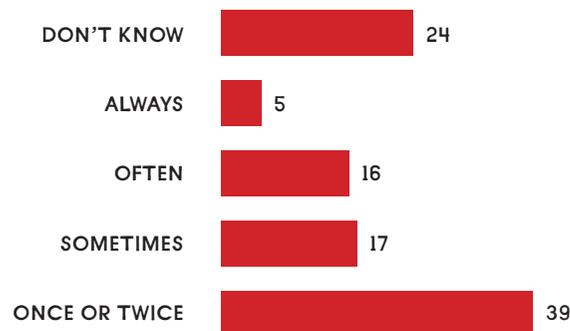


Young people showed high levels of exposure to cyberbullying, with 38% of respondents who were or knew of someone cyberbullied within their age group, exceeding the findings of other studies which placed victimisation rates between 16% (Smith et al, 2008) and 30% (Cross et al, 2009). Measuring the exposure, as opposed to victimisation rate alone, captured behaviour undermining aspects of wellbeing embedded in their environment such as; pressures, circumstances, networks; self-perceptions and quality of relations with peers. Indeed, there were no measurable differences between regional areas when compared against regional lines, which indicated the universal nature of the problem across the country. Age comparisons in contrast, identified a difference; with older youth 5% more at risk of exposure compared to younger youth (Figure 1). This was explained by greater feelings of emboldened technological use and levels of independence that came with age, which led to a subsequent lack of monitoring and perceived licence to cyberbully:

‘When you get to that age, you can have your own Avatar and be whoever you want to be, but it means that anything can happen . . . you become a different person.’

Figure 2: Most young people, 39% experienced cyberbullying once or twice (n=426)

FREQUENCY OF CYBERBULLYING EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG PEOPLE (%)



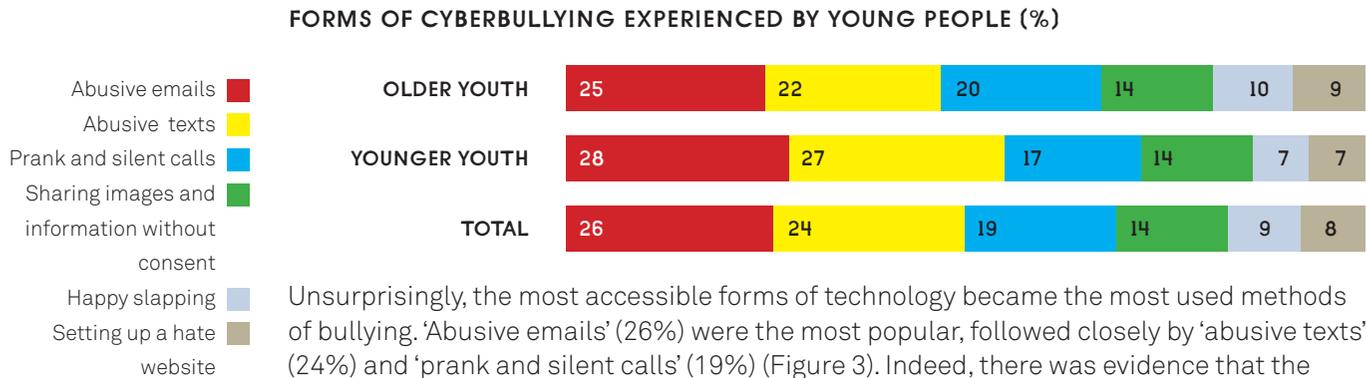
Given the scale of incidence, cyberbullying was a more transient and threatening facet of contemporary bullying practice in the sporadic and unpredictable nature of its deployment. Individuals experienced it over a short lifespan and infrequently - 39% mainly 'once or twice' compared to 5% experienced constantly (Figure 2). Age differences were not statistically significant indicating the extent to which this low frequency was a universal feature. Previous research, such as Hinduja and Patchin (2009), cited cyberbullying as a pattern of ongoing behaviour. Its inconsistency and unpredictability in this study highlighted an alternative view of persistency which continued to have detrimental effects on wellbeing, significant enough to be noted by respondents.

Although not exhaustive, varying explanations were provided. Some respondents reflected on possible under-estimation from young people who found it difficult to come to terms with or quantify their predicament. There were also overinflated expectations as a result of the well documented sharper end of experiences in the media, skewing people's judgement of its frequency. Reports of low persistence also reflected the positive outcomes of direct and indirect intervention which stunted the growth and escalation of incidence, but not its existence:

'I think it gets solved more quickly 'cos schools have more information about it and there's more things [to receive advice from] on the internet I think.'

1.2 THE METHOD OF CYBERBULLYING

Figure 3: The most experienced mode of cyberbullying was abusive emails, 26% of those cyberbullied (n=426)



Unsurprisingly, the most accessible forms of technology became the most used methods of bullying. 'Abusive emails' (26%) were the most popular, followed closely by 'abusive texts' (24%) and 'prank and silent calls' (19%) (Figure 3). Indeed, there was evidence that the ease of execution contributed to the method of bullying in the low incidence of erecting 'hate websites', named the most labour intense method. Participants attributed this to the specific technical skills-set, creative thought processes and condition of holding high degrees of malicious intent required to establish and maintain sites. Fortunately, the barriers of time, knowledge and effort, in this case, inhibited the growth of more deviant behaviour.

When disaggregating by multiplicity, a complex picture was depicted. On one hand, this convenience did not translate to the instant deployment of numerous methods since respondents were bullied using one method (48%). On the other hand, a total of 52% of young people were bullied with numerous tools (25% through two methods and 27% using three or more), indicating aspects of its ubiquitous nature as it encroached into different forms of communication. The closeness between the two statistics may have captured a transitory snapshot in which online bullying and mobile harassment were deployed simultaneously and interchangeably. The impact of this change was evident in the comparison of ranking in other studies which positioned mobile phone bullying above online bullying (NCH, 2005; Cross et al, 2009). An explanation for this, arguably, was the mainstream use of smart phones since the early twenty-first century which reduced the distance and logistical barriers in executing one form above another. Providers, regulators, and researchers who have tended to disaggregate forms and lines of responsibility may need to reconsider the extent to which such a distinction can be made.

Comparing risk status, older youth experienced higher levels of cyberbullying, 3% more, across the more 'creative' and aggressive categories and also more numerous mediums, with the largest difference in 'happy slapping'. In comparison, 5% more younger youth experienced higher incidences of 'conventional' forms, particularly abusive text messages. A common theme in previous research was that age undeniably contributed to differences of increased proficiency and sophistication of knowledge that increased with age (Kowalksi and Limber, 2007). It did, to a degree, in the more creative categories, but traditional forms of cyberbullying persisted at high levels amongst younger youth (Figure 3).

The variety in the mode of cyberbullying, subtlety with which it was deployed, and exclusion of the victim from the process, made it more difficult to self identify as a victim. Finding parallels to research by Abrams et al's (2010), young people's subjective interpretations uncovered cyberbullying as discrete, particularly in the sharing of images and information. This removed their control and ownership of personal and often embarrassing pieces of information. To exacerbate this, its public and viral method, often without the knowledge of the victim, increased feelings of humiliation and paralysis to prevention. With more exclusionary practices, such 'stalking' via Facebook and removal from online discussions and social network friend membership, awareness of their targeting was often ignored or accepted as part of their evolving social life. In the case of 'happy slapping', where images or videos of being taunted were shared between peers in larger viral spheres, it was not only trivialised, but legitimised and accepted as an extension of banter between friends. Although it was difficult to ascertain which cases of cyberbullying were 'real', the accumulation of these qualities delayed the labelling of something that had the potential to escalate into something more vicious:

'[Happy slapping] is just mates fooling around....it all depends on what they record and how you are with your friends. It's not all bullying . . . it's funny.'

The type of experience and subsequent understanding of victimisation differed with age. Younger youth described receiving a range of actions that were detrimental to their transition into secondary school, such as having rumours spread and photos shared without their consent. More aggressive behaviour was shown towards older youth who faced the exchange of sexually provocative and explicit images of themselves or other people, death threats and computer viruses from their peers:

'[Cyberbullying] is without saying it to their face, but targeting someone and sending you pictures and messages of rude people doing rude things - mentally or sexually.'

1. Nature and prevalence of cyberbullying:

summary Cyberbullying affected a high proportion of young people (nearly 40%) either as victims, witnesses or with knowledge of peers as victims, and experienced mostly in non-persistent manner. The shape and path of cyberbullying was complex. The accessibility and the fashionable aspects of device were contributing factors in the form of cyberbullying and multiplicity of devices used. Abusive emails and harassing phone calls were equally the

most popular. Sources of under reporting and under recording were due to the discreteness of cyberbullying (a greater issue for younger youth), and general ambiguity between young people's perception of acceptable behaviour.

Prevalence rather than frequency varied by age, indicating the universal characteristic of being experienced in an infrequent manner, but overall risk status increased with age, particularly with multiplicity of device.

2. TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND DISCOURSE ABOUT EFFECTIVE WAYS OF STRENGTHENING RESPONSE AND PREVENTION

The second part draws on young people's attitudes, knowledge and interpretation of the levels and styles of effective and targeted intervention. By doing so, it is intended to help embed young people's opinions in future responses and actions.

2.1 LOCATION AND TIMING OF CYBERBULLYING

Figure 4. Half of young people felt that cyberbullying occurred outside of the school rather than inside (n=1222)

'When you walk to summer school, even with mates they do it. You can't see them and you can't get away from it.'

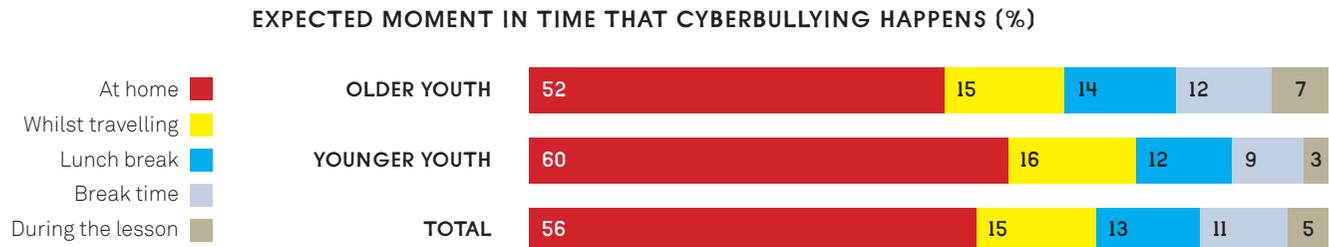
EXPECTED LOCATION OF CYBERBULLYING VICTIMISATION (%)



Positive attitudes towards schools were self evident. A total of 99% from the online survey felt 'safe and secure' at school, 94% felt it was the most effective place for education and deterrence and 90% wanted schools to have more powers to maintain success and discipline. Indeed, the extent to which this was the case came from 50% of respondents from the postal survey who felt cyberbullying persisted within the wider community (Figure 4). Schools offered diverse sanctions that acted against the impunity of bullies, provided avenues for reconciliation through rehabilitative and restorative justice processes and supported education and preventative initiatives. Respondents found the latter important since many reported high levels of self efficacy and felt the onus was on themselves, as responsible and informed consumers, to minimise exposure to harm. At its simplest, this began with being more receptive to and applying safety tips such as ensuring the identify and familiarity of friends, being more cautious of whom they added as contacts, and restricting personal details they made public on social networking sites. More widely, although not exclusively, student-led initiatives such as peer mentoring networks and the Diana Anti-Bullying Ambassador programme, allowed young people to offer relevant styles of support and opportunities to feed into formal problem-solving discussions in democratic processes. It was the fragmented growth and questions of sustainability of initiatives which inhibited opportunities for horizontal transfer of learning between peers and their younger successors.

Figure 5: Just over half of respondents, 56% felt that cyberbullying was experienced whilst at home (n=1282)

‘Outside of school, there are a lot of people who become unsafe.’



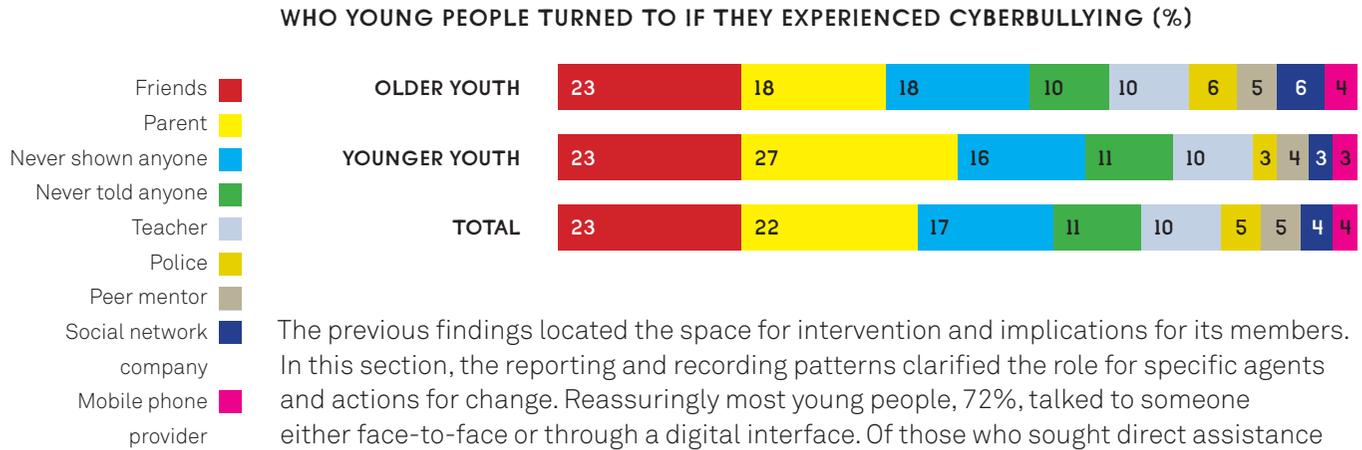
Reflecting on its ubiquitous nature and narrowing the timing of cyberbullying, periods away from school became the primary location of concern. A little over half of respondents, 56%, felt cyberbullying was experienced within ‘the home’, and 15% ‘whilst travelling’, even in the company of other peers and friends (Figure 5). The higher prediction of home victimisation and concerns of its slow resolution were compounded by the gap in knowledge of technology between parents and their children, which limited the quality and range of information imparted to young people. Some described the need to strike a balance between parents providing freedom of use, applying conditions of use and being taught on the responsibility of usage, without creating a form of censorship. Through proactive knowledge gathering on safety (prior purchasing devices or the internet), and inclusion in wider conversations with local authorities and internet providers, parents could become more involved in protecting and monitoring their children’s activity both directly and indirectly.

Age comparisons, however, indicated the difficulty in apportioning responsibility to either the school or home since the majority of older youth, 46%, were less confident in the refuge of the school (Figure 4). The increased independence young people sought with age, resistance to internet controls and ease at which they could bypass age restrictions on social networking sites made the design of programmes problematic. Although the study did not focus on the perspective of the aggressor, young people’s technical prowess and persistence to engage in rule-breaking behaviour, in all spheres of life, were aided by certain qualities that came with age. Bestowing responsibility on any actors of change, therefore, needed to reflect this dilemma:

‘When you are older, you bring and use your phone in class anyway. You can’t go on websites [within schools] as they ban it, but we just use our phones’, ‘I didn’t before, but now most of us have smart phones.’

2.2 RESPONSE TO BEING OR SEEING CYBERBULLYING

Figure 6: 67% of young people confided in either their friend or parent (n=474)



The previous findings located the space for intervention and implications for its members. In this section, the reporting and recording patterns clarified the role for specific agents and actions for change. Reassuringly most young people, 72%, talked to someone either face-to-face or through a digital interface. Of those who sought direct assistance from familiar people; ‘friends’ (23%) were the most trusted, followed by ‘parents’ (22%) and ‘teachers’ (11%), implying that cyber safety messages were reaching young people (Figure 6). Certain types of relations were more important for different age groups with younger youth dependent on the guidance of parents, 9% higher compared to their older counterparts. This reliance only became problematic when concerns were raised of the degree to which parents were fully equipped to protect or intervene. In comparison, older youth were dependent on their knowledge and search techniques rather than the guidance of an adult. They confided in friends and utilised a complex set of resources beyond their immediate circle such as charities, network providers and the police:

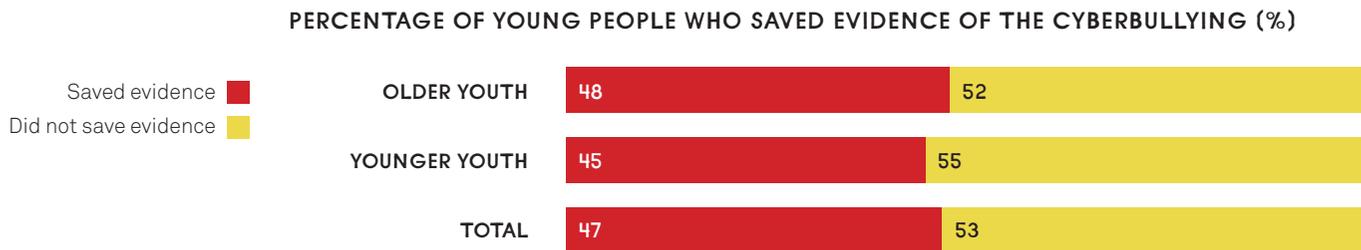
‘I guess if you are younger, you don’t think you know it all. They [older youth] think they can sort it out themselves.’

It was unclear if this independence was related to the severity of the incident or behavioural patterns among the older age group since they also had a greater knowledge of saving evidence, 3% more compared to younger youth. This intuition confirms research which found families were more important to younger children’s wellbeing and peer relationships were more valued by older youth (UNICEF, 2007).

Despite these positive patterns, there were general obstacles in the degree of openness about victimisation, since 28% of all respondents had not made the incident public - consisting of 17% who had ‘never shown anyone’ and 11% who had ‘never told anyone’ (Figure 6). Low response rates were not symptomatic of shortfalls in knowledge since a large number knew how to save evidence; 62%, but only 47% actually saved evidence (Figure 7). Despite continual reluctance to be forthcoming, there was an even greater mental barrier to provide proof of the bullying. This prevented evidence gathering against an aggressor which was required to pursue the discipline of serious cases.

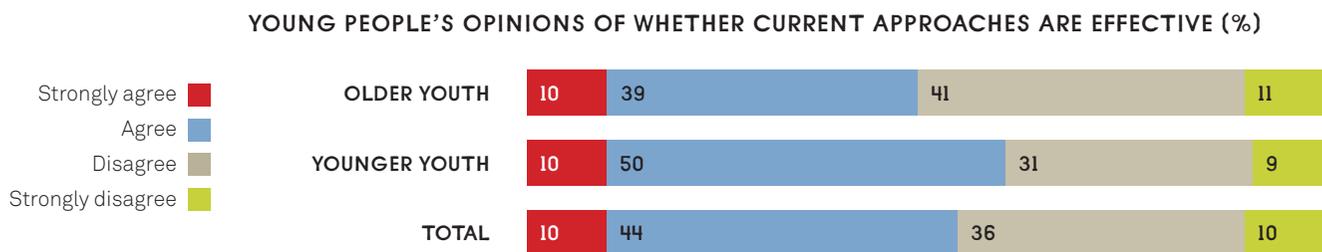
‘I don’t know [if approaches are effective], actions have been taken, but cyberbullying still happens.’

Figure 7: 53% of respondents did not save evidence of the cyberbullying (n=437)



2.3 ANTICIPATED HOPES AND FEARS

Figure 8. 54% of respondents agreed that current initiatives and approaches were sufficient in tackling cyberbullying (n=1117)



The relatively low non-response rates and high disclosure rates were, however, not indicative of overwhelming satisfaction with the effectiveness of current support. Indeed, there was a general split of opinion of whether current initiatives were sufficient in targeting their needs, prevention, protection and empowerment, with only 54% who 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' compared to 46% who 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' (Figure 8). Ambiguity existed for two reasons. Firstly, attempts to be self-directed were not free of barriers, particularly with social networking sites cited as one of the greatest sources of inadequacy in self protection. There were ineffective signposting of safety features, limitations in existing ones, logistical difficulties in reporting directly, and few deterrent features which were also void of obvious sanctions. Thus, although young people did utilise an extensive support network, the few that did, did so with difficulty. Secondly, there were reasonable doubts that existing approaches were targeting the changing forms of cyberbullying since 78% of young people felt it was increasing compared to 7% who thought it was decreasing (Figure 9). The age comparison gave additional insights with older youth who had a more pessimistic outlook that it would increase (81% compared to 74% of younger youth). Cyberbullying itself was not described as a large threat but there were pessimistic tones that it could not be prevented due to its ability to evolve with newer forms of technology. This made it a longstanding issue, knowledge that the older age group felt they were privy to:

'Companies like Google and Orange look like they are doing something about it, but there are newer ways to bully . . . you have to see what the latest technology is.'

Figure 9. 78% of respondents feared that cyberbullying rates would increase (n=1161)

'Online bullies are by strangers. I don't know who it is. You can't solve the problem.'

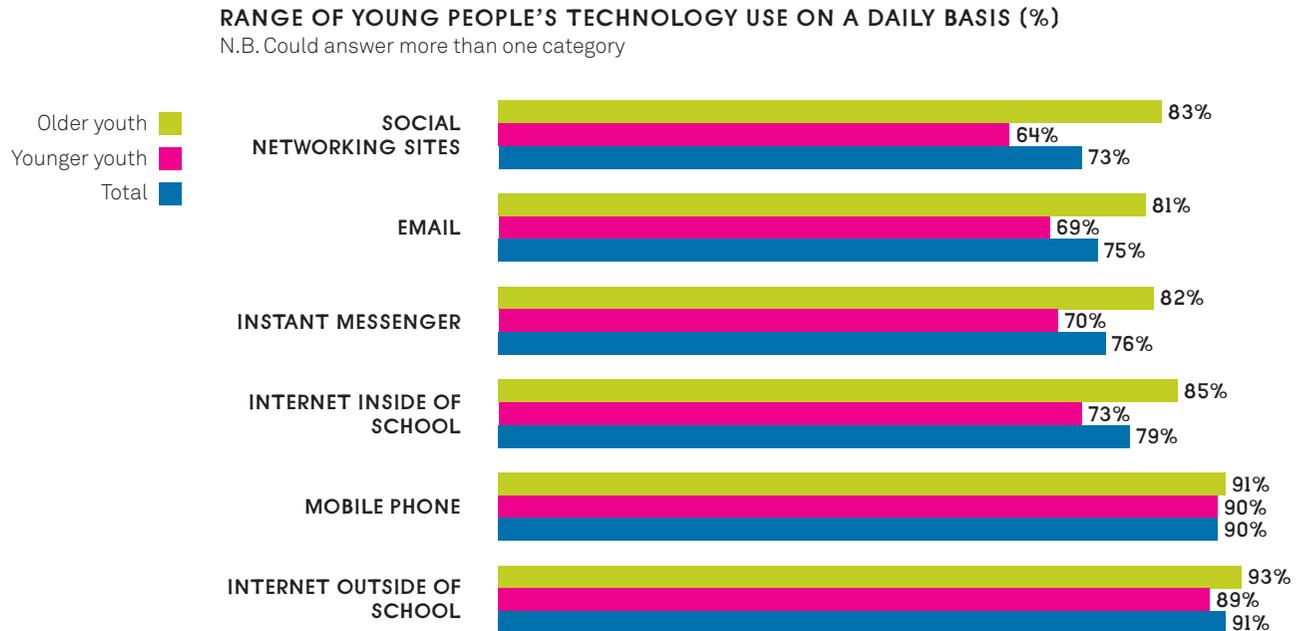
YOUNG PEOPLE'S OPINIONS ON WHETHER CYBERBULLYING IS INCREASING, DECREASING OR STAYING THE SAME (%)



The extent to which this warranted further attention was in the popularity and common use of technology which uncovered the strength of young people's online and technological presence. On a daily basis, 90% of young people used a mobile phone and 91% accessed the internet outside of school hours, mainly using messaging services (76%), followed by emails (75%) and social networking sites (73%) (Figure 10). When examining the patterns between different ages, there were identical tastes and preferences but higher usage of existing high levels by older youth compared to younger youth. Policy makers and practitioners have a difficult task of working alongside these uneasy and sometimes unhealthy tensions, particularly when some respondents would compromise their safety to maintain communication:

'I wouldn't go to the police [if cyberbullied] as they're gonna tell you to deactivate your account. But what if you don't want to?'

Figure 10. Most young people, 91% of respondents, used the internet outside of school hours (n=1282)



2. Effective ways of strengthening response and prevention: summary

Young people's attitudes highlighted the importance of a whole-school and multi-tiered approach. The majority felt the home (referring to time spent away from the school rather than source of harm) was the location of cyberbullying, although older youth were more at risk of its omnipresent nature since they feared higher rates within both the home and school. Schools were generally effective vehicles for change, due to the acquisition of skills and tips on self protection and opportunities to participate in wider learning. The home was revealed as a location of a shortcoming of knowledge, requiring parents to be active and digitally savvy consumers, and internet providers to build support and information around parents.

Close familial and peer networks were heavily relied upon, setting precedence to tangentially supporting these groups as well as young people. This differed by age, with older youth more inclined to use independent routes such as friends and formal agencies, with younger youth relying on parents and family surroundings.

There was an ambivalence of the effectiveness of current intervention with 54% of young people satisfied, but 78% fearing cyberbullying would increase due to the evolving nature of technology burgeoning into the daily lives of each young person. There was huge scope for greater intervention, although this was inhibited by the reluctance and fear of disclosing incidences and tension between seeking protection and maintaining freedom of use.

PART 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has started the process of unravelling some of the complexities of cyberbullying experience and perception, particularly the role of age. Different youth groups have different risk statuses, coping strategies and skill-sets to seek self-directed support. Older youth experience higher levels of cyberbullying and aggressive methods, using peer-to-peer support and independent means to address the problem. Younger youth face more discrete and traditional forms of cyberbullying, have less knowledge for self protection, and rely on parents for support, indicating large imbalances of knowledge of relatively small age ranges.

Levels of cyberbullying have not dissipated, with 38% of young people in this study affected by it. This requires the school, the community and more private settings to sharpen protection and response. The school is heralded as a beacon of good practices, particularly with student-led initiatives, but not experienced widely. The home is a key source of support, but a place of higher expectations of vulnerability and widening gulf in knowledge and protection between child and parent. Technology and digital companies' provision of safety nets are seldom frequented and require greater collaboration and communication with their consumers to improve approaches. Young people also recognise their role in behaving responsibly and engaging with technology to shape communities in a positive way, but require assistance to do this.

While this study represents the voices of a substantial number of young people, we acknowledge that it has limitations; mainly an absence of parental views and the restriction of two age groups. Resolving the problem of cyberbullying is full of tension between education, provision, freedom, protection, pragmatism and sustainability, not all of which can be resolved. The findings are, however, indicative of bigger issues that need further research and attention. Crucially, the fast pace of digital technology advancement and the rapidly evolving nature of cyberbullying means that research needs to continually explore the experiences of different aged children and young people in cyberspace. This can only be achieved with the active participation and inclusion of young people in processes that are both informed by and with them. Only then can policies and practices become habitual weapons within young people's protection arsenal. In recognition that there can be no 'one-size-fits-all' policy prescription, particularly when it comes to addressing the needs of different ages, the report proposes four categories of recommendations:



RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a better understanding:

- Funding and planning of programmes and research that recognise age differences as shaping the experience and perception of risk.
- Time and resources for the formation and management of initiatives and partnerships that include or are led by young people in order to replenish ideas and create relevant approaches.

Building capacity and sustainability:

- Charities and private sector organisations to provide leadership training and skills development for young people to spearhead awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives.
- Schools, with already finite resources, to gain access to more capital and investment if they are to proceed to become a community of good practice and a hub for local knowledge exchange about cyberbullying.
- Funders to ring-fence funds for sustained anti-bullying work within communities to counter high levels of bullying, particularly cyberbullying.

Maintaining and sharing good practices:

- Charities and private sector organisations to engage in information exchanges with young people, parents and each other to develop good practices.
- Schools and young people to roll out student-led initiatives and provide opportunities for participation in formal democratic processes.
- Schools to feed the findings of this study and others, into professional development training for school staff at all levels, from teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors, Newly Qualified Teachers, middle managers and senior managers.
- Government led commitment to create one central anti-bullying resource and best available practice for all parents and adults working with young people, as well as young people themselves.

Providing direct protection:

- All sectors to educate young people and parents on creating mutually agreed actions, enacting protection features, supporting victims and drawing on other sources of support in more serious cases of cyberbullying.
- Internet, mobile phone and technology companies to provide continuing, visible and accessible cyber safeguards that engage with parents and young people in their design and appeal. This may mean improving and enhancing safety features, more regulation, policies and codes of conduct.
- Parents need to be more aware of how to protect their children with technology and deal with cyberbullying. They should seek safety tips before purchasing products such as parent-managed software for children or be signposted to places where they can seek updated advice to manage risks to prevent using restrictions as a form of censorship.
- Young people to share the responsibility in staying safe online and to not abuse their skills.
- Schools to continue with both rehabilitative and sanction-based approaches, whilst also deepening education programmes to (re)educate young people on online etiquette, protection, prevention and behaviour.
- Central government to hold industries, schools, colleges and youth organisations to account, implementing and regularly reviewing cyber bullying policies. In some cases, to encourage signatories to good practice agreements and self regulation.

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