# 3

# Cyber-bullying

3.1     This Chapter examines the need for an agreed definition of cyber-bullying, the nexus with 'traditional bullying', who is cyber-bullying and the experience of some young people, the causes and means, prevalence, impact and implications, and concludes with coping strategies and the role of bystanders.

## Definitions

3.2     The Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance drew attention to the need for a clear definition that would assist international and Australian researchers.[1] The Australian Council for Educational Research noted that it is 'very hard' to define cyber-bullying.[2]

> If you ever, as I do, ask young people to talk about cyberbullying they go, 'What? I have never been cyberbullied.' If you ask, 'Have you ever had rumours spread about you? Have you ever been excluded?' They go, 'Oh yes.' I say, 'Under this definition that would be considered bullying behaviour.' We have much to learn from them and they have much to learn from us.[3]

3.3     The Murdoch Children's Research Institute stated that research into cyber-bullying in Australia was limited by two important factors: 'the use of

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1   Professor Phillip Slee, Australian Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS11.
2   Dr Paul Weldon, Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, *Transcript of Evidence* 9 December 2010, p. CS42.
3   Ms Robyn Treyvaud, Founder, Cyber Safe Kids, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS35.

inconsistent definitions and the lack of longitudinal data' on the factors influencing it.[4]

3.4 The Alannah and Madeline Foundation noted that there was little agreement about use of the term. Many websites referred to any negative online behaviour using it, without stressing its repeated nature.

> Like the traditional definition of bullying, Cyber Bullying usually involves systemic communication over a period of time. A one off communication would not usually be considered cyber bullying. The only exception would be messages containing death threats or indication of serious intended harm.[5]

3.5 As it related to young people, an American expert defined cyber-bullying as:

> any cyber-communication or publication posted or sent by a minor online, by instant message, e-mail, website, diary site, online profile, interactive game, handled device, cell phone, game device, digital camera or video, webcam or use of any interactive device that is intended to frighten, embarrass, hurt, set up, cause harm to, extort or otherwise target another minor.[6]

3.6 Even if it was seen simply as 'bullying', students described and appeared to understand cyber-bullying as a set of discrete behaviours such as ignoring or excluding, threatening, rumours and bullying, carried through mobile phones via text messages, pictures sent, phone calls, email, chat rooms, social networking, games, blogs or through websites.[7]

> While there is no doubt Cyber Bullying is a real issue an accurate prevalence is hard to measure due to the vague definition of bullying in student based studies. Often students, particularly younger ones, confuse a one-off incident with systemic bullying.[8]

3.7 The WA Education Department suggested cyber-bullying occurs when:

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4    Murdoch Children's Research Institute, *Submission 111*, p. 2.

5    Stride Foundation, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

6    Mr Hugh Kingsley, *Submission 37*, p. 1 citing Parry Aftab, 2010, http://aftab.com/index.php?page=cyberbullying.

7    Alannah and Madeline Foundation: *Submission 22*, pp. 17-18; Dr Judith Slocombe, Chief Executive Officer, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15.

8    Stride Foundation, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

an individual or group misuses information and communication technologies such as email, text messages, instant messaging and website to engage in bullying of other individuals or groups. [9]

3.8    The Mental Health Council of Australia provided another, shorter definition, from *cyberbulling.us*: 'wilful and repeated harm through the medium of electronic text'.[10]

One of the often unseen consequences of Cyber Bullying is that because the intimidation or bullying action is delivered via the written word then the target can read and therefore be affected by the same words again and again.[11]

3.9    The Stride Foundation specified that cyber-bullying had to have a minor on both sides, or at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor. With the involvement of adults, it became cyber-stalking.[12]

3.10   The Attorney-General's Department defined cyber-bullying as bullying using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones.[13]

3.11   In this Report, the term will be used to indicate a sub-set of bullying, or covert bullying using technology: unprovoked, aggressive and intentional behaviour involving the abuse of power in relationships.[14]

3.12   Whatever definition is preferred, the Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance noted that 'cyber-bullying' was 'an adult and media-generated' term. While young people have come to understand it, it is not a term that they use.[15]

3.13   Some bullying, initially at least, is exploratory: what might be construed as bullying in very young children is often a way of expressing things and trying to understand how they relate to other children.[16]

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9    WA Education Department, *Submission 115*, p. 1. See BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p. 8, for a similar definition.

10   Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, p. 5. See safety.lovetoknow.com/index.php/title=Cyber-Bullying_Statistics Accessed 8 February 2011.

11   Stride Foundation, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

12   Stride Foundation, *Submission 6*, p. 13.

13   Attorney-General's Department, *Submission 58*, p. 3.

14   See Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, pp. CS16-17; NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 7.

15   Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, pp. 9, 13 citing Child Health Promotion Research Centre (September, 2009). *Cyber Friendly Student Solutions* Workshop, Perth, Australia.

16   Professor Philip Slee, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS12.

some young people that we spoke to admitted that they may have actually engaged in cyberbullying behaviour without knowing it, not fully understanding the implications of their actions. They identified that this was particularly the case when they could not actually see their victim in some way, so they felt like they would not necessarily understand the full impact of their behaviours online.[17]

3.14    Researchers at Simon Fraser University concluded that 'youth see negative exchanges as just a regular part of the online world and something to be tolerated'.[18]

## What conduct is cyber-bullying?

3.15    The Committee's *Are you safe?* survey asked respondents over 13 years of age what activities constitute bullying. Through free-text spaces in that survey, it appears that young people have doubts about what amounts to cyber-bullying.

3.16    For example, when asked about their experiences with cyber-bullying, respondents made the following comments:

> A disagreement turned into some mild name calling. Over facebook however, name calling is common (and largely un-hurtful) and I don't think that it should be the focus of prevention (Male aged 17)
>
> Cyber bullying can be seen almost every week on social networking sites like facebook, but often the victims don't feel genuinely threatened. Outsiders often interpret things differently than they may actually be, seeing as: if they see acts of cruelty between friends that might actually be a personal joke, they'll think that it is bullying (Female aged 14)
>
> There is a huge fuss over cyber-bullying. I have been an online gamer since I was 6, and cop crap every day from anonymous gamers, and I have no trouble with it, I just treat it as banter and ignore it. Although, inter school cyber-bullying is a totally different thing, and on a more serious level (especially as the bully and the victim know each other), it is quite overated. Calling names etc, is so easily blockable, and ignorable. however, when it gets to matters such as, embarrasing pictures of the victim being posted by the bully, that's when the police

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17    Ms Georgie Ferrari, Chief Executive Office, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15.

18    Simon Fraser University, *Submission 55*, p. 14.

should be involved straight away. I really think people my age just need to grow up (Male aged 15)

cyber bullying is hard to explain/detirmine. what are the boudaries between simple friendly teasing and cyber bullying? schools/tv programs and the government need to broadcast what is and what is not acceptable on the internet (Female aged 15).

Cyber-bullying just depends on how people take it... Sometimes it goes too far and some people don't think of it as being taken too far as some other people tend to take it as just joking. How do you know when one takes it as a joke and someone else thinks it's an attack...? Cyber-bullying doesn't seem like it's that simple of a problem to resolve (Female aged 17).

I think most children who cyber-bully dont realise they are doing it, because it is hard to tell what tone something is written in for example "nice pic" could be being nice and giving a good comment or it could be sarcastic and be being mean and only the writer really knows which one, if they meant to be mean or if they were just being nice (Female aged 14).

3.17    This topic was also discussed in the Committee's High School Forum in Hobart. Young people are concerned that their communications may be misinterpreted or misunderstood by their peers or by adults. This is highlighted by the following dialogue:

Georgia- ... We all have friends on Facebook that would like to swear and make the jokes about the parents who cannot do that sort of thing. It is nothing to do with trust; it is to do with the fact that most of our friends are really immature and-

CHAIR-So it is a sort of harmless banter, is it?

Georgia-Yes. and it can be taken out of context if you are not reading it the right way. My mum has said a few things to a few of my friends about stuff that has been on my Facebook that has been taken way out of context.[19]

It depends on how certain teasing comments are taken. Some posts snowball as sometimes about a hundred people all contribute to a discussion which can sometimes include abuse of a person for the opinion they express. While I believe this is often innocent, if the person

19    Georgia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 April 2011, p 12.

> was hurt then this would be cyber-bullying. This sort of behaviour is not uncommon (Female aged 17).
>
> Someone made a facebook group and it was only an 'inside joke' (a joke which only people who are 'in on it' will understand). It was taken the wrong way by an unwitting and easily offended person and the person who created it was harrassed and labelled a cyber bully (Male aged 15).

3.18    The importance of context was raised later in the Forum with the following comments:

> Georgia-There is also a very fine line between bullying and mucking around. I have a lot of friends who go to the Hobart campus at aye and we communicate through Facebook. Our relationships are based on bagging one another out. My mum has also taken that out of context and said things like, 'Please stop saying that to my daughter' when I had given it as much as I had taken it.
>
> CHAIR-So it was not offensive to you? You were not concerned about it but your mother saw it and she thought it looked as though someone was having a go at you?
>
> Georgia-Yes. Like what was said, you can see parts of the conversation or you can see where people have wished you happy birthday so you only get part of the text and not all of it.
>
> Sally-In talking about taking things out of context on social networking sites, I think it is a big issue. Because it is done over the internet you are not actually talking face-to-face with people. Sometimes it is hard to know what was intended seriously and what was intended as a joke or as a friendly sort of jest, because you do not get the expressions and the tone of voice.  Sometimes things can be taken in the wrong manner as to how they are intended.
>
> CHAIR-Is there a way you can overcome that?
>
> Sally-Of course, there are little smiles and symbols that symbolise what you are feeling, but I think that can occur without either party having a problem with that. It is not always exactly clear.
>
> Amanda-I am just agreeing absolutely with what you are saying. Texting as well is incredibly tone deaf, so it is really hard to establish the exact tone in which people are implying what they are saying. Lots of things these days can contain hidden messages or innuendoes. It is really difficult to figure out what exactly is being said and how to take it.

3.19    Involving children and young people in defining cyber-bullying will not only enhance the relevance but also their ownership of the issue, and may increase the effectiveness of resulting policies to deal with it.[20]

**Recommendation 2**

**That the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy invite the Consultative Working Group on Cybersafety, in consultation with the Youth Advisory Group, to develop an agreed definition of cyber-bullying to be used by all Australian Government departments and agencies, and encourage its use nationally.**

3.20    While it is 'a relatively new phenomenon', cyber-bullying is an important and serious issue. According to the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, it has been and remains 'the most pervasive form of serious risk faced by young people when they use technology'.[21]

3.21    Because the two abuses are so closely related, the more general topic of bullying will be addressed before cyber-bullying is explored.

## Nexus with 'traditional' bullying

3.22    The Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance made the point that:

> Bullying itself, is an age-old problem, but has morphed according to the times, the social mores and social context ... While much is now known about the nature, prevalence, and impact of conventional bullying that occurs 'offline' in school settings, research is only beginning to help us understand 'online' bullying and the overlap between the two.[22]

3.23    BraveHearts believed that the same young people who are being harmed online are also being harmed offline, and by the same perpetrators. Cyber-

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20    See comments by Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 90*, p. 19.

21    Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 17;  See also Dr Gerald White, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council of Educational Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS43; NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 7.

22    Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, pp. 10-12.

safety is broader than bullying because it cuts across sexual grooming and accessing inappropriate information that used not to be available so easily.[23] Most young people who are involved in cyber-bullying are also involved in face-to-face bullying. It seems that about 80 percent of children who are victims of bullying, in both senses, online at home as well as at school. Those who are bullied, therefore, need support against both abuses.[24]

3.24    The National Children's and Youth Law Centre provides a confidential advice and information service for children and young people.

> The most common of the questions we have received relating to the Internet relate to bullying, usually bullying that began at school and is continued online.[25]

3.25    Bullying is a subset of aggression and not a fight between equals.[26]

> It is very, very clear that most young people do not bully. Of those who do bully, sometimes when things are going bad in the home or when things are going bad at school they engage in bullying behaviours, but when things are not going bad they do not. So we do not call them bullies because that is an inappropriate label. Sometimes those kids who engage in bullying behaviours are actually calling out for help, and they need help.[27]

3.26    By projecting their anger, anxiety or depression onto others, bullying is a way young people (and adults) attempt to deal with these problems. Other traits associated with this behaviour can include insecurity, low self esteem, victim status and disempowerment.[28]

3.27    Bullying can lead to anxiety, depression, decreased self-worth, hopelessness and loneliness, all of which can be precursors to suicide and suicidal behaviour. The Mental Health Council of Australia referred to evidence of the strong relationship between traditional bullying and victims' ideas of suicide. It can affect victims vocationally, educationally,

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23    Ms Hetty Johnston, Founder and Executive Director, BraveHearts, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS39.

24    Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell: School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS5; Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 12.

25    National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *Submission 138*, p. 4.

26    Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS11.

27    Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS21.

28    Mr Hugh Kingsley, *Submission 37*, pp. 1-2; Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS21.

emotionally, socially and developmentally. Significantly, it can also affect how young people seek help, and how they feel when help is available.[29]

## Some experiences

Jayme was a 14 year old student with a 'rather good view' on cyber-bullying. She/he had experience it first hand, as some friends had been subjected to it 'to the point of self-harm'. While there have been 'many cases' of cyber-bullying on the news, 'a lot' goes undetected. Although 'a few' police officers have been assigned to lecture at schools about appropriate online practices, she/he believed that there is a need for a greater police presence on the Internet.[30]

A female respondent aged 14 said that, while she had not been cyber-bullied, it had upset one of her good friends: 'everyone supported her and stuck up for her'. While the bully had tried to apologise, that could not repair the damage done by the 'mean things' that had been said about the friend's personal life.[31] Cyberbullying is not the problem, bullying is the problem. Cyberbullying is an extremely small part of a far greater whole, if someone is being cyberbullied I can guarantee you that they're being bullied in the traditional sense of the word. Everyone over the age of twenty five seems to forget that bullying still exists in the real world, and now assume it all takes place online. This could not be more wrong.

I have not been a victim of bullying since I moved to my current school in year nine (three and-a-bit years ago), but in years seven and eight I got bullied a lot. A group of kids would come up to me and hurl abuse at me, sometimes they got violent. All this time talk of "cyberbullying" was on the rise, and the problems of us regular victims got left behind. I was cyberbullied to an extent, sure, but this was not what concerned me. I did not dread coming home to an email from someone who hated me, I dreaded the prospect of going to school with someone who hated me and having those written words be spat at me before getting my jumper ripped off me and being put into some new and innovative choke hold.

In an email there's always a delete button, in an instant message there's always a block button, in a five on one fight behind the

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29 NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 9; Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, p. 5; Ms Michelle Noon, Program Manager, Youth, beyondblue, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, pp. CS1-2.

30 Jayme, *Submission 139*.

31 Abbie, *Submission 132*.

school building there's no such thing.

Please, put the focus back on preventing bullying as a whole, not looking through a microscope at the issue and running around condemning all online interaction which is what it feels like is often being done.

Please, I realise this program is designed specifically to help the youth achieve a safe online experience, but I haven't seen a single initiative (government or otherwise) to stop schoolyard bullying since mid primary school (9 years ago). In early high school there were no such things, and that's where my problems started. What's the use of a safe online experience if offline experiences are riddled with torment?[32]

3.28    Significantly, young Australians who participated in the Committee's *Are you safe?* survey were keen to highlight that differentiating between bullying and cyber-bullying is not helpful or accurate. For example, the following comments were made in response to various questions throughout the survey:

Stop distinguishing between 'cyber' bullying and bullying in reality. It implies it is not real (Male aged 17).

Bullying is something unto itself: cyber bullying is not its own form; it's bullying just using another outlet. There's nothing special about cyber-bullying. We should be just as wary of it as normal bullying. The same way we need to know about safety just as much as cyber-safety. Adding the word 'cyber' doesn't make a negative activity any more important (with the exception of Cybermen) (Female aged 14).

Cyber bullying, I think is the msot common form of bullying. Everything in this day in age is all about fights starting on facebook and people tend to feel more comfortable behind the keyberod instead of saying it face to face. I guess what im trying to say is that people need to relise what there saying on the internet. About themself and others, i have lost a friend over  bullying on facebook because of the threats she got, so she killed herself. This was and still is a very sad matter and ever since that has happen I think people should do something about bullying and tell us teenagers that there are other opions (Female aged 14).

Cyberbullying is awfully hurtful, and even though these things are said

online, doesn't mean they aren't affecting people in the real world. Cyber World DOES meet with the Real World (Female aged 13).

I think cyber-bullying is simply an extension of regular bullying and that the fundamental issue that must be solved is not rooted in the technology but social interactions. Although, young people should be aware of their safety while on the internet (Female aged 17).

Cyber bullying, from what I've seen, is exactly the same as bullying in real life, just online. The main provocations are 'different' people, and the only way I can think of to reduce it is to educate younger people that there's nothing wrong with any 'different' groups of people (Female aged 14).

i personally don't see the difference between bullying and cyber bullying, cyber bullying is just directed through a different outlet. with this in mind you will never fully stop bullying so why treat cyber bullying any different (Female aged 14).

Weirdly enough, the government seems to have this idea that cyber bullying is somehow different from normal bullying. It isn't, it's fundamentally the same thing, teasing, harassing, etc, except it is aided by the constant accessibility provided by electronic media., and "staying safe online" has nothing to do whether you'll be bullied or not. As always, people will bully and there will be people who are bullied, the only way to stop that would be to make people realise the ramifications of their actions, even though there will be some people who won't care regardless, but there's not much you can do to stop that (Male aged 17).

3.29    The online component of bullying adds a significant factor in terms of depressive symptoms.[33] A major difference between cyber-bullying and offline bullying is that it may have no respite, as it occurs at any time and can be difficult for parents/carers to detect. [34]

> The always-on nature of modern communication means that the child can be bullied 24x7 without regard to where they are or what they're doing. There is no safe-haven, no let-up, no relief, no way to escape. The child can't read their email, contact their social

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33    Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15.

34    Australian Parents Council, *Submission 10*, p. 3. See also Australian Education Union, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

networks, or read the text messages on their mobile phone without letting the bullies into their lives.[35]

3.30    Mr Nick Abrahams and Ms Ju Young Lee believed that cyber-bullying spilt over naturally from the school playground, and that it gained a further dimension once mobile phones became easily available to young people.[36]  In a final free text space, the following comment was submitted:

> Cyberbulling is really bad because there is no escape. Yes, bullying at school is horrible but at least it stays at school. Cyberbullying follows you everywhere and is at home, the one place your meant to feel safe. There needs to be more information on how to prevent or stop it (Female aged 14).

3.31    Cyber-bullying has all the features of bullying, with the additional feature of deliberate, covert misuse of the online environment that makes attacks quicker and easier. The NSW Government noted that research into cyber-bullying is in its infancy. Some studies suggest that it may be more harmful for young people than traditional bullying because it is covert. Harmful messages can also potentially be received by many people, and they can be re-read many times by the victim.[37]

- people who are bullied have no place to hide, and can be targeted anytime and anyplace;
- cyber-bullying can involve a very wide audience;
- people who bully are relatively protected by the anonymity of electronic forms of contact, which can safeguard them from consequences or retaliation; and
- people who bully do not usually see the response of the victim, changing the satisfactions or inhibitions normally generated by bullying.[38]

3.32    It is possibly the most insidious form of bullying identified to date, and its key elements are:

- Imbalance and misuse of power;

- Repetition;

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35   Mr Mark Newton, *Submission 15*, p. 6.
36   Mr Nick Abrahams and Ms Ju Young Lee, *Submission 66*, pp. 2-3.
37   NSW Government, *Submission 94*, pp. 7-8.
38   NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 7.

- Deliberate

- Intention to change power status; and

- Lack of empathy.[39]

3.33    Dr Helen McGrath commented that:

> In the long term, you would predict that the results could be at
> least as bad as face-to-face bullying and possibly worse because
> we do have some suggestions from the research that those kids
> who contemplate cyberbullying probably see it as being much
> more devastating even than other forms of overt and covert
> bullying. This is because of the fact that their victim does not know
> who it is because they can have multiple email sites, multiple ways
> of targeting them.[40]

3.34    The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies noted that cyber-bullying
        is pervasive and not usually a one-time communication. It can present
        itself in many forms and can have many sources, limited only by the
        perpetrator's imagination and access to technology.[41] The cyber-bully one
        moment may be a victim the next.[42] It is often those on the receiving end
        of bullying who will retaliate from behind closed doors, or from the safety
        of a mobile phone, without fear of exposure.[43]

3.35    Direct and indirect forms of cyber-bullying may include:

- direct harassment or intimidation;
- publication of malicious content;
- systems or technology attack, including hacking or intrusion of
  computer viruses;
- manipulation of systems to exclude an individual; and
- false impersonation to defame or misrepresent.[44]

3.36    Common types of cyber-bullying behaviour include:

- text-based name-calling, use of coarse language, profanity and
  personal attacks (many examples involve racism, sexism, as
  well as other types of prejudice);

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39   Mr Hugh Kingsley, *Submission 37*, pp. 1-2.
40   Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University,
     *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS8.
41   Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, *Submission 35*, p. 2.
42   Stride Foundation, *Submission 6*, p. 13.
43   Ms Kelly Vennus, Programs and Training Manager, Stride Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*,
     9 December 2010, p. CS11.
44   Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

- "flaming" (overt attacks on a person), harassment or denigration (put-downs);
- cyber-stalking (use of the Internet to "stalk" or threaten);
- using masquerade, trickery and exclusion;
- "outing" (publicising that someone is gay); and
- sending out humiliating photo or video messages, including visual pornography and sharing videos of physical attacks on individuals (sometimes called "happy slapping").[45]

3.37    The *Australian Covert Cyber-bullying Prevalence Study* found that the 'strategies undertaken to cyber bully change with age in developmental association to the uses of, interests in and availability of technology'.[46]

> Cyberbullying arose in the context of covert bullying in this study, yet is neither uniquely *covert n*or *overt* in its execution. Where the goal is to be circuitous, cyberbullying is secretive, hidden and concealed. Where the goal is to raise status and gain infamy, then it is open and deliberate.[47]

3.38    This abuse of the online environment can be perpetrated from peer-to-peer, adult-to-child, involve groups and unknowing third parties.[48] Peer-to-peer abuse may involve 'the most harmful material'.[49]

3.39    Cyber-bullying is made easier once a young adult makes herself/himself vulnerable by, for example, by posting or sending inappropriate photos to others, by writing personal blogs, or by posting personal photos on Facebook. This can result from peer pressure, or from ignorance of potential consequences.[50]

> Reputation and status amongst peer group relationships with friends is vitally important and covert and cyber bullying are weapons in the repertoire which enable manipulation of reputation; denigration or elevation of status and stalking[51]

3.40    BoysTown found that 'the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying were name calling (80 percent), abusive comments (67 percent) and spreading rumours (66 percent). While name calling showed little difference by age

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45   Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

46   Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 16 citing Cross *et al*, 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre.

47   Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 20.

48   Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

49   Mrs Sue Hutley, Executive Director, Australian Library and Information Association, representing the Safer Internet Group, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 July 2010, p. CS11.

50   Mr Nick Abrahams and Ms Ju Young Lee, *Submission 66*, p. 2.

51   Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 19

or gender, abusive comments were found to be significantly more common among victims aged 15-16 years'.[52]

3.41    The following comments were made by young Australians who participated in the *Are you safe?* survey. The comments were made in response to questions about witnessing bullying online:

> people harasse each other and get invloved in issues that their friends have and end up threatining or fighting people because they took their friends issues to the heart.  and people post comments about other students intentionally so they can see what they are writing, constant nagging (Female aged 14).
>
> A girl at my old school cyber bullied a dark skinned girl and got five other friends to join in and post racist photo's, drawings and comments about her so that her facebook wall was full of them. She even got threats asking her to leave the school (Female aged 13).
>
> On formspring, a site that enables you to post anonmous comments, I have seen quite a few rude and mean things said to people I know, often repeatedly. (Female aged 14).
>
> I think the main problem or reason that cyber bullying seems to be increasing is that most young people are unaware that cyber bullying can be as serious/harmful as face-to-face bullying. It seems that many people are willing to post a nasty comment online, often people who would never dream of saying the same to a person's face. Young people need to be made aware that cyber bullying is just the same and can have the same disasterous consequences as other bullying forms. There is also the issue of anonymity, where bullies believe they cannot be traced and are therefore able to say whatever they wish. Ensuring young people are aware that police or other authorities have full access to internet history and the ability to track internet use I think would reduce the number of people willing to bully on the internet (Female aged 17).
>
> Comments about a bunch of immature people in a year level. Done in retaliation or annoyance. Not written maliciously, but not particulary subtle either. I am mentioning this becuase it was a number of people making these comments or likeing these status's. It wasnt a hate campaign (Female aged 18).
>
> During a fight between friends, someone got their facebook acount hacked and altered. She shouldn't have given her password to her

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friend, especially because they fought and that was the result of trusting someone (Female aged 16).

Girls didn't get along at school, attacking each other on the internet through facebook making rude comments and suggestions to each other on facebook e-mail, meaning that I got the massages, being sent to multiple people. I watched it all un fold, but being at a spereate school to them at the time I was not heavily involved, I recieved the e-mails. The school was notified by the girls parents and the e-mails were shown and the situation was sorted (Female aged 14).

It's pure stupidity. They make rumours and comments that are utterly pointless. They only do this to seem superior on the internet, because they've never had the guts to say those things in real life (Female aged 15).

Name calling amongst girls in lower grades of high school. Social networking-attacking pictures, clothing, character of the person, actions the person has done, embarrassing stories, threats to the person and their family. It was done in a group with all members participating. From what I could tell there were three girls on each side attacking one another (Female aged 16).

Silly rumours or arguments of the junior years seem so immature... The seniors have definitely experienced it when they were juniors but bullying and foul-mouthing other kids just seems so common and re-occuring... It's like the domino effect... Involvement in situations with boyfriends, girlfriends, trying to get friends and 'groupies' to gang up on them and start a fist fight outside the internet........ (Female aged 17).

3.42    Similarly, during the Committee's High School Forum, Amanda commented:

A lot of stuff that happens over the internet escalates very quickly because you are not face to face with the person. It gets out of hand because you are not dealing with it immediately; you are just saying words. and I do not think you fully understand the implications, impacts and consequences of what you are saying. It is really difficult if someone does actually threaten you on Facebook. I do not know if there is a procedure on Facebook for dealing with that.[53]

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53    Amanda, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 April 2011, p 20.

3.43    More specific comments were submitted in the *Are you safe?* suvey that specifically discussed the site *Formspring*. When asked about how often they witness bullying online, the following comments were made:

> A lot [of cyber-bullying] is centred around FORMSPRINGS. i think that site should be perminatly BLOCKED in australia, because i can't think of one thing that is good about it but at least 5 of my friends have had their last 3 years wrecked by it (Female aged 15).
>
> A site called Formspring has been around for quite a while, and opens up the opportunity for anonymous questions to be asked to people. However the people creating these accounts are very much aware that sometimes they will receive the cruel question/comment (Female aged 15).
>
> It involved the facebook & formspring websites. My friend was asked nasty questions on her formspring page about whether she had brain damage, her being adopted and about her and her boyfriend. She also received mean comments on her facebook page. This was all done by girls in her grade at school (Female aged 16).

3.44    In response to the same question, comments were also made about keyboard-warriors:

> Fights between people escalated because they were 'keyboard warrior-ing'. People gang up on other people so they seem cool to their friends (Female aged 17).
>
> The bullies themselves are what we call 'keyboard warriors'. They will repeatedly bully you online, but when push comes to shove, they will say nothing in real life (Female aged 14).

## Causes and means

3.45    There are many different mediums for cyber-bullying, including:

- the Internet—via personal websites or weblogs (blogs), email messages, discussion groups,
- message boards, online personal polling sites, chat services, instant messaging (IM), or social networking websites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo;

- mobile phones—using short message service (SMS) or multimedia messaging service (MMS); and

- online games—used to abuse or threaten other players, or to lock victims out of games.[54]

3.46    Evidence on the causes of cyber-bullying is mixed.

> Kids are going to engage in risk behaviours because of their developmental needs to, regardless of what intellectually they know.[55]

3.47    The National Children's and Youth Law Centre stated that:

> There is a misconceived sense of empowerment in the online world where cyber users adopt aliases to maintain a degree of anonymity. Anonymity encourages thoughtless misuse of the Internet, producing instantaneous and often uncontrollable effects that are comparatively more permanent, probative and pervasive than otherwise in the offline world.[56]

3.48    Some young people, however, say that they would do things online that they would not do offline, because anonymity affords them the opportunity to act on any anti-social impulses that might otherwise be tempered in public. Children, in particular, are 'more likely' to bully in the online environment because they are able to hide their identities.[57] Those who are bullied physically and feel powerless go online feeling totally empowered.[58]

3.49    While this may be false, the sense of anonymity reported by some young people may influence the way they bully or are bullied. Some admitted that they had not fully understood the implications of their actions. This was particularly likely when they could not see their victims.[59] The Australian Parents Council stated:

> While children and young people see the online environment differently from adults, their incorrect assumption of anonymity online needs to be addressed, with an understanding of the

54    Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

55    Mr John Dalgleish, Manager, Strategy and Research, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS15.

56    National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *Submission 138*, p. 5.

57    Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS14; Communications Law Centre, *Submission 63*, p. 6.

58    Ms Robyn Treyvaud, Founder, Cyber Safe Kids, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS35.

59    Ms Georgie Ferrari, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15.

long-term impact that bullying and harassment online (and off) has on the perpetrator and the victim.[60]

3.50    The perceived anonymity of the online environment was commented on by participants in the *Are you safe?* survey, with many attesting to its emboldening effect on those that cyber-bully others. For example, the following comments were submitted in response to various questions throughout the survey:

> People feel more confident when they are online and say things that they would not be able to say to the persons face. They feel more confident online because the person cannot see them (Female aged 17).
>
> Formspring also proves a problem that anonymous messages can be posted, allowing Cyber-Bulling to be anonymous, more appealing to bullies (Male aged 14).
>
> Usually it comes as being insulted by an anonymous. But the degree I've been exposed to is mild enough that should someone be emotionally damaged by the comment, they're not going to make it very well through life, let alone the internet. That's not to say that there aren't worse things out there though (Female aged 14).
>
> A great majority of internet sites e.g. 'TeenChat' and 'Formspring' have no requirement for only registered users. The amount of untraceable, anonymous and fraudulant users of these sites could be as little as four, or as great as a million. Cyber bullying occurs so easily when the bullies have no fear of being recognised or caught, because they are anonymous. On sites which operate as the above mentioned do, no one can feel safe (Female aged 17).

It needs to be impressed upon kids that their digital footprint is part of their reputation and may come back to bite them in their adult life for example when they are seeking employment. They also need to know what constitutes cyber-bullying and what the penalties are.[61]

> As a Year 9 student, cyber bulling has had varying effect on me. Knowing some of the many reasons why people cyber bully has made me more aware of it and its degrees of impact on people.

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60    Australian Parents Council, *Submission 10*, p. 3.
61    Parents Victoria Inc, *Submission 143*, p. 2.

> Anonymity plays a big role in cyber bulling – the idea of 'being the one behind the screen' and 'pointing the finger without anyone knowing who you are' gives the bully even more satisfaction and chances without being caught. The computer screen becomes a metaphor for a massive wall protecting the bully from backlashes & consequences.
>
> A lot of people have a sudden change of personality when online – they may create fake accounts, imitate people or be very dissimilar to what they are in real life. Experiencing bullying myself, I know this is extremely common. Going online gives opportunities for many to experiment and compete for attention. This may be ideal for some individuals due to [in their opinion] boredom or hatred of their lifestyle and relationships with others, although there are various reasons why people have rifts within.
>
> To prevent more cyber bullying, we could try:
>
> • stronger website policy on bans & personal safety
>
> • stronger police enforcement
>
> • different kinds of education
>
> • government-run youth forums
>
> I do hope you take these things into consideration and try to create many combatants against cyber bullying.[62]

3.51    The perception that this abuse is anonymous may be fast becoming a fallacy because the 'vast majority' of online bullies are also engaged in this behaviour offline. Research also suggested that there are both private and public ways of cyber-bullying, so that it is possible for a perpetrator to be covert and anonymous, or quite overt. The Australian Parents Council noted that the 'incorrect assumption of anonymity' online needs to be addressed because of the long-term impact that cyber-bullying (and bullying) has on both perpetrator and victim.[63]

3.52    Internet users, especially young people, should be made aware that in certain circumstances law enforcement officers may be empowered to ascertain identities such as computers used to commit offences online.[64]

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62    Jedidiah, *Submission 133.*

63    Australian Parents Council, *Submission 10*, p. 3. See also Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS14; Dr Barbara Spears, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15.

64    Communications Law Centre, *Submission 63*, p. 6.

3.53    When asked if they witnessed cyber-bullying in the last twelve months, the following experiences were shared by respondents in the Committee's *Are you safe?* survey:

> Cyberbullying isnt just about the bully, there needs to be more help for the victim and less chances for the people who bully. There should be a one chance rule for bullies and it should not be tolerated by sites such as facebook who tend to turn a blind eye to these occurences. My "friend" bullied me, through facebook, IM and formspring non-stop because she didnt like how I was becoming closer to her old friends. Formspring should also be banned because it gives bullies free reign on contrlling someones life via the internet, and trust me when I say that when your being cyber bullied you are scared and feel alone and NO ONE should ever have to feel like that (Female aged 14).
>
> I have been cyber-bullied, but it was a few years ago. It was 27 pages of teasing and swearing, then my dad told the bullies that they will see him in the school office the next morning. I was too scared to go to school, but I did. The next morning, the principal said they couldnt do anything, because it was out of school, so they got no punishment. He said to not bother with the police because we were only 12. I still got cyber-bullied, and i got very upset. I hope in the future, they will get punished (Female aged 14).
>
> A friend of mine was constantly being told nasty things on her formspring (eg.that she should commit suicide). It made her mental health condition worse than it already was. She knew she should never have signed up for the site and has deleted it now but she will never forget what was said on there (Female aged 15).
>
> A girl I knew wouldn't have sex with her boyfriend, so he made his friends send her anonymous and abusive text messages. Once she found out who did it, she told her principal and the boys were suspended (Female aged 13).
>
> a person i know had abusive messages sent to her because someone hacked into her facebook and decided to read her private messages. she was continuously abused over her facebook and through texts (Female aged 16).
>
> I didn't know the full story at the time, but, a friend of mine made a comment to somebody i knew but wasn't exactly friends with at the time (though now we have gotten to be quite good friends) and then the person who the comment was made to decided to post on the person

who made the comment's wall on facebook. it was immature but in a way he was defending himself. but then, it was taken too far. he showed up at the school i currently attend (as does the boy who made the first comment) wanting to fight him. luckily, that boy had left for home an hour ago. he then started posting on his wall asking when and where he wanted to fight, the first boy's friends started to intervene and decided to jokingly make references to a Call of Duty (on some sort of electronical gaing device) battle instead of having a real fight which angered the boy who had posted these things as well as his friends. it was decided when and where tthe fight was to be held but the one who was my friend didnt show up thankfully, as the other boy and his friends had knives (i was actually told this by the boy who brought them, if it were a rumour i dont think i wouldve believed it) in the end, i know i had a talk with the boy who had been harrassed first, told him not to worry about it because in a few years he probably wont even remember this guy and that writing on his wall is showing that his comment affected him. after that they had a talk and now they are not friends but not enemies, just mutual (Female aged 15).

i was the one getting cyber bullied, and i still am. but there isnt much you can do when it's more then one person, because if you tell the teachers or police, they talk to the bullies, warn them punnish them, watever, it doesnt stop them from verbally making me feel bad when they see me, and i doesnt stop them spreading roumors. bottom line is, kids NEED to learn to get along, because whether they like it or not, we all fall into the same community and it makes life much easier if we get along (Female aged 15).

I've seen in with my younger sister who is 9 years old, and it's more that they don't realise how unsafe the internet can be and believe that they can get away saying certain things via email. It was nothing too serious, but it was concerning that a 9 year old was being affected by cyber bullying in some way, even though it was minimal (Female aged 16).

just one person posting un-necessary rumours about someone else they didnt like that then broke out in alot of things being said that may not have been meant but were just said as a defence for themselves. then this disagreement that began with two people ended with at least twenty people becoming and getting themselves involved (Female aged 14).

My "friend" continually cyber bullied me until i stopped it by blocking and deleting her as a friend. She would continue calling me names and making up stuff to turn my friends against me, which really ruined a

few of the genuine friendships I had with people (Female aged 14).

my best friend was being bullied by 4-5 girls since the June last year and they were calling her with swear words and telling her she was ugly and no one likes her and then she (my friend) got irritated and she moved to another place, but they still bully her (Female aged 13).

My best friend was bullied very badly and she had depression and self harm issues because of it (Female aged 17).

My fourteen year old sister is frequently cyber-bullied over both the social networking site Facebook as well as Formspring, as are many of her friends and people she knows. It causes her a lot of distress, largely because she is unable to escape it. It affects her self-esteem and happiness( Female aged 17).

My sister has had trouble with her 'friends'. At school they were nice to her, face to face. But outside of school, in the Facebook world, they were very mean. And whenever there was a fight, it was over Facebook, and they said things they never would have said otherwise, face to face. I also see other things all the time, everyday on Facebook; status' and comments that either directly, or often indirectly bully others (Female aged 17).

One of my best friends for 10 years was talking to another girl online and this girl started calling her really mean names and my friend got really upset and it got so bad that she overdosed on headache tablets and ended up in hospital for a week. She's fine now though but it made us all feel really bad and worried for her (Female aged 13).

There was a girl at my old school who was disliked by the majority of people, and they were constantly mean to her. A couple of times I told them to stop it, but it never makes any difference. I think she told the school about what was happening, but it was hard for them to do anything. It still happens, and it makes me really angry because no-one is able to stop it, and no matter how much of a bad person she might be, no-one deserves that (Female aged 15).

3.54    In response to the same question, comments were made that specifically discuss where photos have been used to cyber-bully others:

My friend sent nude pictures to a few boys and flashed herself a few times over Skype. The photo was sent around my whole school along with two or three other schools (Female aged 15).

> Someone at my school hacked into a few girls accounts and posted rude pictures(not of the girls) and copied their messages of what they had been saying about other people(inboxed messaged onh facebook) and posted them. They also got some pictures of a girl in a bikini- zoomed in on their chest, tagged all of her friends as well as my school facebook page (Female aged 14).
>
> Strangers went out of their way to insult a girl repeatedly on the social networking site, Tumblr. Manipulating photos of her using photoshop and making them embarrassing and humiliating for the girl (Female aged 16).

3.55    Comments were also submitted in response to various questions throughout the survey that discuss instances of cyber-bullying from the perspective of those bullying their peers, or those witnessing their friends or siblings bully others:

> a close friend of mine frequently has fights over facebook. She posts status' about it and will make threats and talk ig of herself on there. She can never back it up, and she usually gets abused in person by the people she was threatening (Female aged 14).
>
> boy discussing how unattractive/fat/stupid his ex was publicly on his fb status, posting mean things about other peoples girlfriends, being generally sexist towards women    Girls calling others sluts/homewreckers/threats etc (Female aged 16).
>
> my brothers face book is the worst, he has 300+ friends and they all pick on the fat and ugly people just cause of the way they look (Female aged 17).
>
> on facebook. when someone has a problem with someone else they like to post it on their profile so that everyone can see whats happening. usually they are the 'cool' kidspicking on the lesds popular kids so thats why they decide to post it cause they know they will always have a group of their friends to badger these poor children (Female aged 16).
>
> Someone i know hacked into another persons facebook account and sent everyone in the school a variety of pictures of genetalia, aswell as teachers. The bully also falsly stated that they were gay in order to frame their victim in an attempt to embarass and shame them on the same e-mail (Male aged 18).
>
> I am a troll, i provoke people, with my intellectual insults that a lot of

> people don't understand, i poke harmless fun at them to get a reaction out of them, i only do this to my good friends, because they know of my joking. However if someone is bullying my friend i will troll the bully so they stop bullying my friend in need (Male aged 16).

3.56    The survey also asked its respondents aged 13 years or older if they had cyber-bullied someone else. Of total respondents (15,592), 1,379 respondents reported they had bullied another (8.8 percent).

Table 3.1     In the last 12 months have you been directly involved in cyber-bullying?

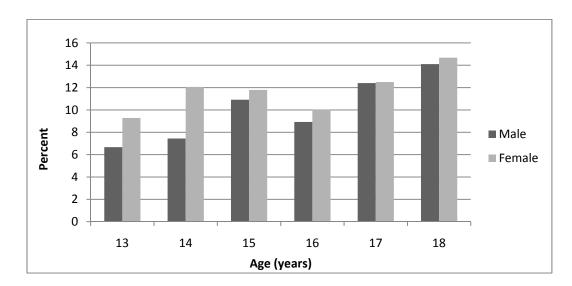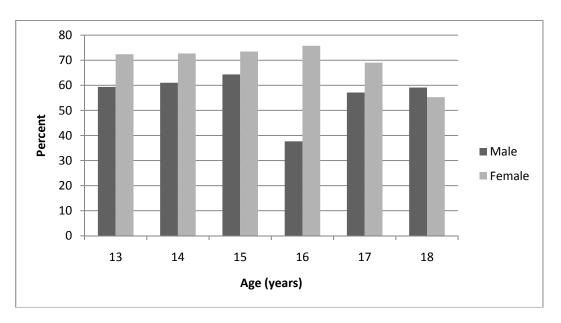|  |  | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Sex* | # | # |
| 13 Years | M | 126 | 1890 |
| | F | 228 | 2456 |
| 14 Years | M | 120 | 1612 |
| | F | 239 | 1982 |
| 15 Years | M | 130 | 1191 |
| | F | 162 | 1374 |
| 16 Years | M | 72 | 807 |
| | F | 100 | 998 |
| 17 Years | M | 49 | 395 |
| | F | 71 | 568 |
| 18 Years | M | 44 | 312 |
| | F | 38 | 259 |

Figure 3.1    Proportion (%) of those directly involved in cyber-bullying aged 13 years and over



3.57    Although the number of young people cyber-bullying others might be higher than these results found, the primary purpose of the question was to assess whether this group had also been on the receiving end of bullying.

3.58    Of those that reported they cyber-bullied another person, 66 percent reported they had also been the victim of bulling online (n=910).

Table 3.2    Of those that cyber-bullied another, have they also been targets of cyber-bullying by others?

| | | Yes a victim | | Not a victim | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Sex* | *%* | *#* | *%* | *#* |
| 13 Years | M | 59.3 | 73 | 40.7 | 50 |
| | F | 72.4 | 165 | 27.6 | 63 |
| 14 Years | M | 61.0 | 72 | 39.0 | 46 |
| | F | 72.7 | 173 | 27.3 | 65 |
| 15 Years | M | 64.3 | 83 | 35.7 | 46 |
| | F | 73.5 | 119 | 26.5 | 43 |
| 16 Years | M | 37.7 | 26 | 62.3 | 43 |
| | F | 75.8 | 75 | 24.2 | 24 |
| 17 Years | M | 57.1 | 28 | 42.9 | 21 |
| | F | 69.0 | 49 | 31.0 | 22 |
| 18 Years | M | 59.1 | 26 | 40.9 | 18 |
| | F | 55.3 | 21 | 44.7 | 17 |

3.59    The graph below shows the differences in gender among those that reported they had cyber-bullied another, but were also on the receiving end of bullying. As is shown, female respondents reported a higher rate:

**Figure 3.2    Proportion (%) of those that cyber-bullied who have also been targets of cyber-bullying by others aged 13 years and over**



3.60    The Committee's survey sought young people's responses to the major reasons why people cyber-bully. Respondents were given a list of reasons and asked to select the main motivations. Those completing the survey aged 12 years or younger gave a very mixed response, with few differences between the options:

- Mixing with the wrong crowd;

- People looking for a fight and/or have an aggressive personality;

- Fighting over girls or boys;

- Copy cat of news stories;

- Boredom;

- Bad home life;

- Lack of respect for others;

- Not liking people with disabilities; and

- Not liking people from different backgrounds.

Table 3.3    What are the main reasons why people cyber-bully?

| | Sex | Mixing with the wrong crowd | People looking for a fight | Fighting over girls or boys | Copy cat of news stories | Boredom | Bad home life | Lack of respect for others | Don't like people with disabilities | Don't like people from different backgrounds | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| 6 Years | M | 37.3 | 41.3 | 40.0 | 26.7 | 49.3 | 42.7 | 41.3 | 36.0 | 45.3 | 26.7 |
| | F | 46.3 | 46.3 | 31.7 | 23.2 | 41.5 | 48.8 | 37.8 | 30.5 | 41.5 | 31.7 |
| 7 Years | M | 22.9 | 37.5 | 29.2 | 18.8 | 25.0 | 31.3 | 27.1 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 10.4 |
| | F | 37.5 | 28.1 | 34.4 | 17.2 | 31.3 | 37.5 | 32.8 | 31.3 | 21.9 | 10.9 |
| 8 Years | M | 36.4 | 50.0 | 35.5 | 28.2 | 21.8 | 33.6 | 23.6 | 30.9 | 28.2 | 7.3 |
| | F | 19.6 | 41.2 | 30.9 | 25.8 | 14.4 | 35.1 | 19.6 | 24.7 | 19.6 | 7.2 |
| 9 Years | M | 27.4 | 46.2 | 30.2 | 18.6 | 16.5 | 33.7 | 28.3 | 27.6 | 31.6 | 6.6 |
| | F | 30.0 | 44.2 | 30.4 | 24.1 | 14.2 | 34.5 | 27.4 | 25.6 | 30.4 | 8.7 |
| 10 Years | M | 29.8 | 50.7 | 29.7 | 18.6 | 18.1 | 42.7 | 36.3 | 30.1 | 36.7 | 7.1 |
| | F | 30.3 | 49.9 | 30.9 | 17.9 | 17.0 | 42.3 | 37.4 | 27.1 | 36.8 | 9.5 |
| 11 Years | M | 33.9 | 48.9 | 29.2 | 14.1 | 25.0 | 46.6 | 48.7 | 31.9 | 44.6 | 8.7 |
| | F | 35.1 | 51.3 | 27.7 | 14.1 | 25.3 | 54.9 | 50.8 | 32.5 | 46.7 | 13.6 |
| 12 Years | M | 41.6 | 47.9 | 31.9 | 13.7 | 31.7 | 56.1 | 53.8 | 34.4 | 48.3 | 11.0 |
| | F | 42.9 | 49.2 | 30.0 | 13.3 | 31.9 | 64.8 | 56.1 | 36.5 | 52.6 | 18.0 |
| 13 Years | M | 63.7 | 66.7 | 51.9 | 17.5 | 32.5 | 56.0 | 59.8 | 44.2 | 58.8 | 8.6 |
| | F | 62.3 | 68.7 | 50.7 | 15.6 | 31.5 | 61.0 | 61.9 | 41.9 | 56.8 | 10.7 |
| 14 Years | M | 63.4 | 68.5 | 51.0 | 18.5 | 40.0 | 52.3 | 61.9 | 38.8 | 54.7 | 9.7 |
| | F | 58.9 | 71.2 | 53.6 | 16.5 | 40.1 | 57.4 | 68.5 | 36.6 | 51.9 | 9.9 |
| 15 Years | M | 55.2 | 67.0 | 47.2 | 19.9 | 44.9 | 50.0 | 61.6 | 37.3 | 52.1 | 11.3 |
| | F | 56.6 | 69.4 | 55.0 | 16.2 | 46.0 | 54.7 | 69.1 | 33.7 | 49.6 | 9.7 |
| 16 Years | M | 52.7 | 63.3 | 49.2 | 19.0 | 45.0 | 44.5 | 64.4 | 31.2 | 46.6 | 9.8 |
| | F | 52.0 | 67.1 | 51.9 | 15.8 | 50.0 | 44.0 | 72.9 | 30.0 | 43.9 | 9.4 |
| 17 Years | M | 51.9 | 65.1 | 44.6 | 21.3 | 48.9 | 42.5 | 64.8 | 32.7 | 44.8 | 13.9 |
| | F | 48.8 | 63.6 | 50.4 | 15.7 | 57.2 | 42.4 | 78.5 | 27.3 | 44.9 | 10.9 |
| 18 Years | M | 54.5 | 59.9 | 52.9 | 31.7 | 49.0 | 49.0 | 60.6 | 42.9 | 55.4 | 24.7 |
| | F | 50.2 | 57.5 | 51.4 | 28.2 | 52.5 | 43.6 | 61.4 | 37.5 | 51.0 | 24.7 |

3.61    More significance was noted between respondents aged 13 years and older. The most common reasons or motivations for cyber-bullies included:

- Mixing with the wrong crowd;

- People looking for a fight;

- Bad home life; and

- Lack of respect for others.

3.62    Other motivations that were highly reported included fighting over boys or girls; and not liking others from different backgrounds.

3.63    Similarly, comments were submitted in free text spaces throughout the survey that shed further light on the motivations of those that cyber-bully:

> Cyber bulling will always happen as long as there are people who has low self esteem so perhaps work on creating a more supportive community environment? (Female aged 17).
>
> normally people dont cyber bully unless they have alot of support. they wont write something on facebook, myspace ect without knowing there are many people that agree with them or will back them up (Female aged 17).
>
> a lot of bullies get bullied at home so home should be made safer and it won't help making nice places for them to stay (Male aged 14).
>
> being the victim of bullying themselves and therefore wanting to hurt other people in return (Female aged 14).
>
> Fear of the unknown, scared of differnces from the 'norm'. Not enough education (Male aged 14).
>
> Having low enough self esteem that they have to find some kind of self-worth and a sense of authority by prodding a weaker audience because they refuse to come to the inevitable truth: they can't have a stable friendship because they're too afraid of getting hurt to let someone close. That or they have dodgy parents who raised them to think they own the world (Female aged 14).
>
> I think that some cyber bullying starts by people incorrectly interpretting a situation.  Communication through just words can often be misunderstood (Female aged 14).
>
> In online communities it is common for fights to break out and grudges

> to be held between people (Female aged 16).
>
> Ignorance between people leading to conflicts and fights that could be considered cyber bullying (Male aged 16).
>
> ignorance to different people's customs and religions, the need to take out their anger on others (Female aged 14).
>
> Low self esteem, social prestige, to confirm a status in community-perhaps an online one or in life such as school or youth group (Female aged 16).
>
> Low self esteem; Someone feels better if he/she can make someone else feel terrible about him/herself (Male aged 18).
>
> Making the wrong choices or saying something when nothing should be said (Male aged 16).
>
> Not accepting people of different personalities etc and being very judgemental as is our nature these days (Female aged 17).
>
> People who try to be "heroes", think they are cool because they cyber-bullied someone, also, groups egging on other students to cyberbully someone (Male aged 15).
>
> people who want to demoralise fellow peers who they have something against. (but normally the victim won't have done anything wrong) (Female aged 15).
>
> supposed "Anonymity" being able to express opinion without consequence (Female aged 17).
>
> They are going through a rough path in life, and get all of the anger out on the victims they bully (Female aged 14).
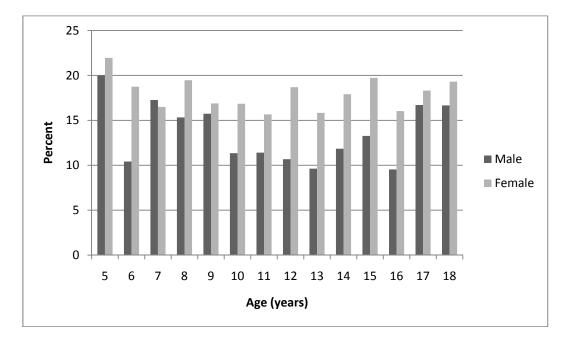
## Prevalence

3.64    Research to date shows that rates of traditional bullying are higher than those of cyber-bullying.[65] The Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance stated that there was strong 'suggestive' evidence that cyber-bullying had increased 'in the last few years' with the technological

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65    See Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS2; Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS14; Murdoch Children's Research Institute: *Submission 111*, p. 2; Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Senior Research Fellow, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, pp CS22, 25; Dr Barbara Spears, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS12.

shift from Web1.0 to Web 2.0 platforms: from email to social networking sites. At the same time, from simply being a technological and safety device, a mobile phone had become a social tool that indicated connectedness and status.[66]

3.65    The Committee found similar results in its analysis of its survey results. Respondents were asked if they had been cyber-bullied in the last year: rates of cyber-bullying remained under 22 percent, with females generally reporting higher rates.

Figure 3.3    Proportion (%) of those that have been the targets of cyber-bullying the past 12 months by age and gender



3.66    Recent research revealed that 10 to 15 percent of students surveyed have experienced it more than once. Other submissions quoted higher figures, in one case suggesting that the rate could be as high as one in every three Australian young people. Experience from America and Britain suggests that this will increase, as 30 to 40 percent of students in those countries have experienced it.[67]

> Cyberbullying has been and remains the most pervasive form of serious risk faced by young people when they use technology.[68]

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66   Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 9.
67   Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 17. See also WA Education Department, *Submission 115*, p. 1; Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Submission 80*, p. 7; Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, pp. 12, 15-18.
68   Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 17.

3.67    While one in four Australian children has been exposed to bullying,[69] in a recent Vodafone survey:

> The Vodafone report revealed just one in five parents surveyed believe that their child had been exposed to bullying, one in ten acknowledged their child had been a witness to bullying and a startling 0% responded their child was a bully.[70]

3.68    The Committee's *Are you safe?* survey also asked its participants of their exposure to bullying online. Female participants aged eight to 17 years reported higher exposure to bullying online than their male counterparts, with the average rate peaking between 15 and 17 years.
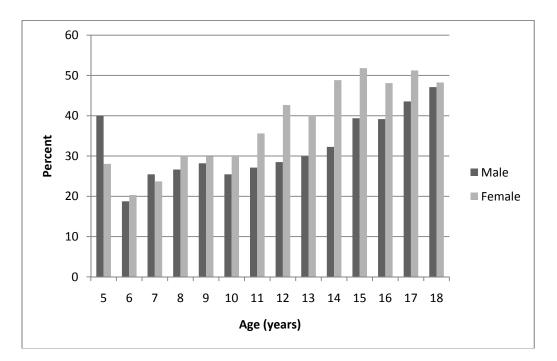
Figure 3.4    Proportion (%) witnessing cyber-bullying in the last 12 months by age and gender



3.69    Microsoft Australia noted that parents/carers are challenged when dealing with cyber-bullying. Research commissioned in 2008 found that 83 percent did not know what to do if a child was being cyber-bullied, and two out of three were unsure of the best ways to help their children. Almost all the parents/carers surveyed were aware of the problem, and

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69    Kidspot at http://www.kidspot.com.au/School-Bullying-Facts and figures-about-bullying+258+article.htm.

70    Vodafone Hutchison Australia, *Submission 141*, p. 8, citing *Vodafone Digital Parenting Report – Safety*, October 2010, Omnibus.

three-quarters said that they were more concerned about this issue than they had been a year previously.[71]

> Studies have also found that children are more likely to talk to their parents than to teachers about being bullied, yet many parents of children who are bullied do not always know how best to talk to their children about the issue, and hence require appropriate information and support to deal with the incidence of bullying.[72]

3.70 Researchers at Simon Fraser University concluded that 'much of the cyber-bullying activity is happening under the radar of school staff and parents'.[73] A recent survey of girls by the Department of Education, Science and Training found 57 percent had been defamed online, but most were reluctant to tell their parents/carers or teachers about it.[74]

3.71 While parents/carers may be beginning to be more aware of what young people do online, as many as 60 percent of young people have had a negative experience online, but 52 percent of parents/carers did not realise it.[75] The Australian Parents Council stated:

> parent use of the internet and social networking platforms, particularly those with children is now catching up to usage by children and young people so parents have a better understanding than 10 years ago.[76]

3.72 Moreover, because parents/carers are not sure how to respond to cyber-bullying, children and young people may effectively be blamed for raising the issue. Although there is 'an enormous amount' of material available about cyber-bullying on the Internet, this range of information prevents parents/carers from establishing what among it is worthwhile.[77] Without the right strategies and tools, adults run the risk of further isolating their

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71 Microsoft Australia, *Submission 87*, pp. 2-3.
72 Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 90*, p. 20, citing Cross *et al*, 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre.
73 Simon Fraser University, *Submission 55*, p. 15.
74 Device Connections Pty Ltd, *Submission 51*, p. 12.
75 Mr Craig Scroggie, Vice President and Managing Director, Pacific Region ,Symantec Corporation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 July 2010, pp. CS3-4.
76 Australian Parents Council, *Submission 10*, p. 3.
77 Ms Kate Lyttle, Secretary, Australian Parents Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS6.

young people.[78] Mr Chriss Watt, Federal Secretary, Independent Education Union of Australia noted:

> there is general agreement about the importance of continuing research on all aspects of cyber safety and for disseminating updated research to parents and the community at large.[79]

3.73    Some abuses, such as cyber-bullying and sexting, are usually carried out by those close to the victim, such as peers/schoolmates, neighbours or 'friends'. Others, such as cyber-stalking and sexual grooming, are generally undertaken online by adults with sinister intentions.[80]

3.74    The Alannah and Madeline Foundation stressed the importance of looking at who is doing the bullying: 46 percent were other students, about one-third did not know who it was, 34 percent were friends and 16 percent were siblings.[81]

3.75    The following submission discusses a personal experience with cyber-bullying:

> I have experienced cyber-bullying it is not a very nice feeling. I am 13 years old almost 14. I am also female. I haven't also been the best student or the skinniest or prettiest girl out there but that is why I have been bullied. I have had my father pass away 2 years ago and a very sick mother; I have also been bullied about this. I am strongly against bullying and it needs to be put to an end! It doesn't need to go to the extent of deleting all the social sites like Facebook and MySpace but it needs better rules for example stopping swearing on these sites should be stopped. I hope this email has helped you a little bit.[82]

3.76    The *Click and Connect: Young Australians' use of online social media* research project by ACMA sought to understand the extent to which young people had experienced cyber-bullying, and had participated in it.

> In Australia, the Australian Covert bullying prevalence study of May 2009 highlighted 7-10% incidences of cyber-bullying among

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78    Mr Chris Watt, Federal Secretary, Independent Education Union of Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS11.

79    Australian Parents Council, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

80     For example, NSW Government, *Submission 94*, pp. 7-10.

81    Dr Judith Slocombe, Chief Executive Officer, Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. 33.

82    Jodie, *Submission 131*.

young people, and the Click and Connect reports recorded slightly higher incidences.[83]

3.77    It demonstrated that cyber-bullying increased with age, in relation to access to technology. By the age of 16 to17 years, nearly one in five respondents had experienced some form of cyber-bullying. Just one percent of eight to nine year olds reported experiencing it. The largest increase occurred between eight/nine and ten/11 years of age, followed by a second smaller increase from ten/11 and 12/13 years old.[84]

3.78    A study of 548 young Australians by BoysTown found that cyber-bullying is a group phenomenon most prevalent during the transitional ages between primary and secondary school. Across the sample, 59 percent experienced cyber-bullying when aged ten-12 years, 52 percent when aged 13-14 years and 29 percent when aged 15-16 years. Significantly, the report also found that the majority of older participants also reported being cyber-bullied when aged 13-14 (15- to 18-year olds: 72 percent; 19- to 25-year olds: 50 percent).[85]

3.79    The most common place for cyber-bullying is at home, followed by the schoolyard. Schools only have a 30 percent influence over what young people learn; 70 percent is about things outside their influence. Often something happens at school that is transferred to the online environment after the school day is over and, by the next day, it has been blown out of proportion. These issues can escalate very quickly.[86]

> I am sending you this email regarding cyber bullying. I am a female and I am 14 years of age and I personally have not been cyber bullied but many people around me that I know have. Cyber bullying is very wrong and can get very serious. It makes me sad to think that people can be so cruel and horrible to people and think it's alright. There have been many cases at my school where cyber bullying has occurred. It happened to one of my good friends and it was so cruel of this person to be so horrible, that my friend

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83    Childnet International, *Submission 18*, p. 2 citing ACMA, 2009, *Click and Connect: Young Australians' use of online social media* and Cross *et al*, 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University.

84    Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2009, *Click and Connect: Young Australians' use of online social media, Quantitative Report,* p. 12.

85    Price M and Dalgleish J, 2010, 'Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people', *Youth Studies Australia,* 29 (2): 51-59 at p. 54.

86    See Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS33; Ms Georgie Ferrari, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS33; Mr Jeremy Hurley, Manager, National Educations Agenda, Principals Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS9.

> got upset but everyone supported her and stuck up for her. This bully said very mean things about my friend's personal life. The bully tried to apologize but they couldn't repair the damage they had done. I strongly think that cyber bullying should be put a stop to because it can lead to depression and people feel unhappy and sad. Bullies should have better things to do then putting people down and making them feel useless. Social Networking sites should have some more security and people who bullied should be banned from that networking site or have their account deleted.[87]

3.80    BoysTown commented that although the data is inconsistent,[88] it seems that while boys are more likely to bully physically, girls are more prone to pursue avenues of harassment involving emotional and psychological abuse.[89]

3.81    Bullying and cyber-bullying peak at times of transition, pre-school to primary school and primary to high school, and require special attention by teachers at those times.[90]

3.82    Among other causes, difficulties in relationships between school friends can lead to increased cyber-bullying.[91] In small children, initially at least, it can be exploratory, as they express themselves and try to understand how they will relate to other children.[92]

3.83    Less than 10 percent of those asked admitted to any involvement in this abuse of the online environment, although older age groups were 'most likely' to engage in cyber-bullying.[93]

> We are now conscious of distinct differences between cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying: a form of covert bullying,

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87    Abbie, *Submission 132*.

88    Ms Megan Price, Senior Research Officer, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS20.

89    Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, *Submission 121*, pp. 2-3; beyondblue, *Submission 5*, p. 2. See also Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Senior Research Fellow, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS25.

90    See Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p 5; beyondblue, *Submission 5*, p. 1; Ms Megan Price, Senior Research Officer, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS20; Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS9.

91    Mr Philip Lewis, Chair, Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools (SA), *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS3.

92    Professor Phillip Slee, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS12.

93    Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Submission 80*, p. 7; WA Education Department, *Submission 115*, p. 1.

> it can happen at any time, anywhere; and there is no escape
> behind doors. Audiences can be huge and reached quickly. Power
> is allocated differently, and bullying can be inter-generational.
> Perpetrators can have at least an illusion of anonymity and their
> behaviour can be disinhibited because of this; empathy is also
> reduced because the victim's reaction is not seen.[94]

3.84    The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition expressed concern:

> ... about the rate of under-reporting of cyber-bullying by young
> people. Young people are more likely to confide in their peers and
> they may not speak up to authority figures fearing that their access
> to technology will consequently be restricted.[95]

3.85    BoysTown also noted that, although cyber-bullying is 'a ubiquitous
        phenomenon', there is still a high level of under-reporting. This reinforces
        the need for active dissemination of information on the issue, and for the
        provision of integrated support for young people to speak out about it.[96]

> In general, most children when we talk to them about cybersafety
> think that adults are being hysterical about the issue. They do not
> see it as a big issue. They will, when pressed, talk about
> cyberbullying being something that they hear a lot about or might
> have been involved in, but the average child seems to have a lot of
> mechanisms to be able to deal with it. A lot of those mechanisms
> come from their peer-to-peer relationships and often from having
> good relationships within their family. It definitely is the
> marginalised youth, who are disconnected within the community,
> who are seeking connections through online forums. For them,
> sometimes it is the first time someone has actually engaged with
> them, so they are really compelled to follow through with that
> relationship because they are getting something back that they get
> from no other part of their life.[97]

3.86    Responses about the prevalence of cyber-bullying vary with the questions
        asked in surveys. If adolescents are asked about it specifically, the

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94  Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 17. 'The disinhibition effect is the
    psychological process that recognises that there is a screen and that when you put things
    beyond the screen there are no consequences and you walk away from it': Dr Barbara Spears,
    Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11
    June 2010, p. CS25.
95  Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Submission 28*, p. 6.
96  BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p. 11.
97  Dr Judith Slocombe, Chief Executive Officer, Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Transcript of
    Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS32.

responses will be quite different to questions that seek to explore a range of abusive behaviours. If questions explored both areas, the answers reveal 'a high prevalence rate'.[98] While 'cyber-bullying' is not a term used by young people, they recognise it.[99] Professor Marilyn Campbell added that:

> if you just ask, 'Have you ever received a nasty text message?' which is a behavioural term, then you do not know whether that is cyberaggression or cyberbullying. Because we know that there are different interventions both for prevention and intervention that work between distinguishing bullying as a subset of aggression and not just as general fighting, I think we have to be very careful that we do not shorthand something and label inappropriately on an individual level.[100]

3.87    The Mental Health Council of Australia pointed out that, because of this lack of research, the prevalence of cyber-crimes in Australia is largely unknown. The five major risks that it identified pose great risks to young people, with potentially catastrophic impacts on their mental health and well-being, both immediately and chronically. From emerging international research, it is clear that the risks to young Australians can be serious, with action required to minimise psychological, social and physical harm.[101]

3.88    The prevalence of cyber-bullying and its severity were also commented on by young people consulted by the Committee:

> it happens everywhere and all the time. threats have become a big issue, particularly from teenage boys to teenage girls and its not getting better. pubescent boys seem to think theyre better than everyone else in the world, and especially teenage girls, so we always cop it. something must be done about this. serious and severe effects have come out of things like this. im not prepared to let it keep happening (Female aged 15).
>
> Tiger expressed the view that cyber-safety is 'getting worse' the more it is mentioned on the news and advertised.[102]

98   Dr Barbara Spears, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS11

99   Ms Robyn Treyvaud, Founder, Cyber Safe Kids, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS35.

100  Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, pp. CS10-11.

101  Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, pp. 3-4.

102  Tiger, *Submission 144*.

> The ratio of people who feel safe and unsafe/ get bullied or don't is different to how how media makes it. We only see the bad things in the papers/on the news, therefore making parents question it probably more than they should (Female aged 15).

3.89    Respondents to the *Are you safe?* survey aged 13 years or older were asked if they believe cyber-bullying was increasing. Almost 60 percent of respondents in this age group believe that cyber-bullying appears to be increasing (58.7 percent), and there is a difference between male and female respondents: 63.1 percent female; 54.2 percent male.

Table 3.4    Is cyber-bullying increasing?

| | Sex | Seems to be increasing % | Has not changed % | Seems to be decreasing % | Not stated % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 Years | M | 62.1 | 27.8 | 7.2 | 2.9 |
| | F | 66.7 | 25.4 | 5.7 | 2.2 |
| 14 Years | M | 57.9 | 32.7 | 7.3 | 2.0 |
| | F | 66.3 | 26.9 | 5.1 | 1.6 |
| 15 Years | M | 56.3 | 33.3 | 7.8 | 2.5 |
| | F | 68.1 | 25.1 | 5.5 | 1.3 |
| 16 Years | M | 53.5 | 35.7 | 7.8 | 3.0 |
| | F | 62.3 | 28.6 | 6.0 | 3.1 |
| 17 Years | M | 49.1 | 38.5 | 9.4 | 3.0 |
| | F | 63.6 | 27.1 | 6.9 | 2.5 |
| 18 Years | M | 46.2 | 41.7 | 9.0 | 3.2 |
| | F | 51.7 | 32.4 | 10.4 | 5.4 |

3.90    Some young people are targeted because of their racial or cultural background. Ignorance, fear and/or prejudice mean that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people tend to be disproportionately victimised by cyber-

bullies.[103] There have been community concerns about the increasing prevalence of bullying 'sexting' via mobile phones, and the impact that these abuses are having on Indigenous young people.[104]

## Impacts and implications

3.91    A considerable amount of evidence was presented to the Inquiry on the impacts of cyber-bullying. All forms of bullying can have serious and negative effects on those involved, both victims and bullies. Young people who are regular perpetrators are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour, criminality, have problems with substance abuse, demonstrate low academic achievements and be involved in child/spouse abuse later in life.[105]

3.92    The research by BoysTown called for effective prevention and intervention strategies for those who have been cyber-bullied. It also showed:

> that the negative impacts of Cyberbullying include diminished self-confidence, low self-esteem, interpersonal conflicts, below-average school performance, extreme sadness and anger, self-harming behaviour, suicidal ideation, and in some notable cases, death by suicide. A number of researchers have also proposed that the impacts of cyberbullying may in fact be more severe compared to those from traditional forms of bullying. This underpins the need for immediate and effective prevention and intervention strategies for those impacted by cyberbullying.[106]

3.93    As these effects can persist in later life, they may contribute to depression in young people, or they may not seek help early for their difficulties.[107]

> cyberbullying is a little different from some of the other things that we were talking about, like inappropriate content, because you are

103   Mr John Dalgleish, Manager, Strategy and Research, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*; 17 March 2011, p. CS20; Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, pp. 17- 19; beyondblue, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

104   NT Government, *Submission 84*, p. 7.

105   Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, pp. 18-19; Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS10.

106   BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p. 9.

107   See, for example, Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS15; Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS8; Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. 9; Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, pp. 5-6; Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 18; beyondblue, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

> dealing with young people who think they are in control and do not recognise when they are not. That is why having easy ways for other parts of the community to be involved in talking about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour becomes very important.[108]

3.94 While there has only been limited research in Australia on cyber-bullying, it is clear from international research, and from research on traditional bullying, that the impact on victims is especially serious for young people who are not adequately skilled to deal with this abuse. Those who experience it often have drops in self esteem, with long-term effects on well-being.[109]

3.95 Because it is covert, cyber-bullying has the potential to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems than overt bullying. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation believed that, because it 'mirrors and magnifies' traditional bullying, it often has severe effects on the mental, social and academic well-being of victims. In the short term, in addition to anxiety and depression, it can impact on school work and cause a sense of helplessness. In the longer term, they have a higher likelihood than their peers of experiencing bad health and problems with social adjustments:

> there were more mental health problems, more anxiety and more depression in those children who reported that they had been cyberbullied than those children who reported that they had been schoolyard bullied. If they had been cyberbullied and schoolyard bullied, they had that same increase of poor mental health afterwards. However, the adolescent students actually said to us that they thought that cyberbullying was not as bad as face-to-face bullying, but the actual results of the mental health showed that it was.[110]

3.96 While every case of cyber-bullying does not lead to it, some victims are so overwhelmed by this abuse that they decide that suicide is their only option.[111] The Mental Health Council of Australia referred to the stories of young people who had been victims shortly before they made decisions to

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108 Hon Mozelle Thompson, Advisory Board and Policy Adviser, Facebook, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 March 2011, p. CS16.

109 Ms Michelle Noon, Program Manager, Youth, beyondblue, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS1.

110 Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, pp. CS16-17.

111 Murdoch Children's Research Institute *Submission 111*, p. 2.

take their lives. It provided three examples of young Australians for whom this seems to have been the sequence of events.[112]

3.97   Cyber-bullying affects young people because of its viciousness, not knowing the identity of the person or persons responsible, the public humiliation of seeing images of themselves posted on an online platform, and their seeming inability to escape. No one seems to be available or able to help them. They worry that parents and teachers will find out, adding to the public humiliation. [113]The abuse is difficult to report because of the pain, the shame, reliving the experience and the possibility of further victimisation people feel in reporting in a culture where it is not encouraged.[114]

> those children who perpetrate bullying are just as disadvantaged in later life as those children who are the victims. So all children who participate in bullying have mental health problems— substance abuse, anxiety or depression.[115]

3.98   It is ironic that the victims are also concerned that, in an effort to protect them, their access to technology will be removed. This probably strengthens the tendency for victims to hide negative online experiences from their parents/carers.[116] It is a matter for concern but not surprising that, when asked to whom they would turn if threatened online by a predator or bully, some young people placed their parents/carers last in a list of ten. They would go to a friend first, and this should be the basis of communication to provide support.[117]

3.99   Most victims of cyber-bullying will tell their friends because they trust them.[118] Another survey suggested that 'only a minority' were

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112   Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, pp. 5- 6.

113   Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 18.

114   Ms Catherine Davis, Federal Women's Officer, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS12.

115   Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS9.

116   Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 18; Ms Kate Lyttle, Secretary, Australian Parents Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS11.

117   Ms Kate Lyttle, Secretary, Australian Parents Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS11; Ms Kelly Vennus, Programs and Training Manager, Stride Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS10.

118   Dr Barbara Spears, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS14.

approaching peers, but that this was very effective when it happened. This should be the basis of communication when support is needed.[119]

3.100 Inspire Foundation's focus groups of young people aged from 14 to 25 demonstrates that restrictive approaches to technology are ineffective and do not justify the negative impact they can have on the enabling characteristics of technology.[120] These focus groups found that:

- Many existing online safety programs emphasise a restrictive approach, in which access to technology is limited to minimise risks;

- Few online safety resources adequately address cyber-bullying;

- A 'large proportion' of young people who had participated in focus groups demonstrated a 'relatively high' awareness of online safety risks. Many reported using risk reduction strategies to stay safe online;

- Young people in the Foundation's focus groups were dissatisfied with safety initiatives that restricted Internet access, although they knew that such restrictions could be circumvented easily;

- Restrictive approaches may discourage young people from discussing online safety issues and/or report problems;

- A 'large number' of young people reported experiencing cyber-bullying, either as victims or perpetrators, but acknowledged that such behaviours were not exclusively products of technology but 'existing social norms and attitudes'; and

- Significantly, there was a prevailing attitude that parents/carers, teachers and youth workers did not really understand technology, or how young people use the Internet, and therefore were not in a position credibly to advocate safe Internet practices.[121]

3.101 The Mental Health Council of Australia noted recommendations from the 4th Biennial Conference of the Australian National Centre Against Bullying, held in 2010. It found that a national commitment was required to increase cyber-safety and reduce bullying across the community. As part of the process to achieve these goals, it recommended ten steps:

- Early intervention;
- Training for teachers;
- An appropriate legal framework;

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119 Ms Kelly Vennus, Programs and Training Manager, Stride Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS10; Mr John Dalgleish, Manager, Strategy and Research, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS13.

120 Inspire Foundation, *Submission 3*, p. 6.

121 Inspire Foundation, *Submission 3*, pp. 8-9.

- An increased focus on transitions at schools;
- A whole-school approach;
- A whole-community approach;
- Young people to be part of the solution;
- Technology to be part of the solution;
- Support for on-going Australian research; and
- Federal funding.[122]

## Coping strategies

3.102   It is clear that any two young people, approached by a bully, will react in different ways. Some have skills, a better sense of self, and can deal with the abuse. It is important to build up that sense of self in children.[123]

3.103   BoysTown also found that across their lifetime, participants had tried a number of strategies to cope with cyber-bullying. These included traditional 'offline' strategies of confronting the bully, seeking help from parents, siblings, family and teachers, retaliation and staying offline. 'Online' strategies of blocking the bully, removing them from friendship lists as well as changing profile names or mobile numbers. [124]

3.104   Similar results were found in the Committee's survey. Of its participants aged 12 years or younger, commonly used strategies were talking to friends or family and staying offline or blocking the bully. Many respondents who had been bullied in the previous 12 months reported using multiple strategies to address the problem.  A relatively low percent reported that they ignored the bullying behaviour, with a higher percent reported among the male respondents.

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122  Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, p. 6.

123  Ms Kate Lyttle, Secretary, Australian Parents Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS15.

124  Price M and Dalgleish J, 2010, 'Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people', *Youth Studies Australia*, 29(2): 51-59.
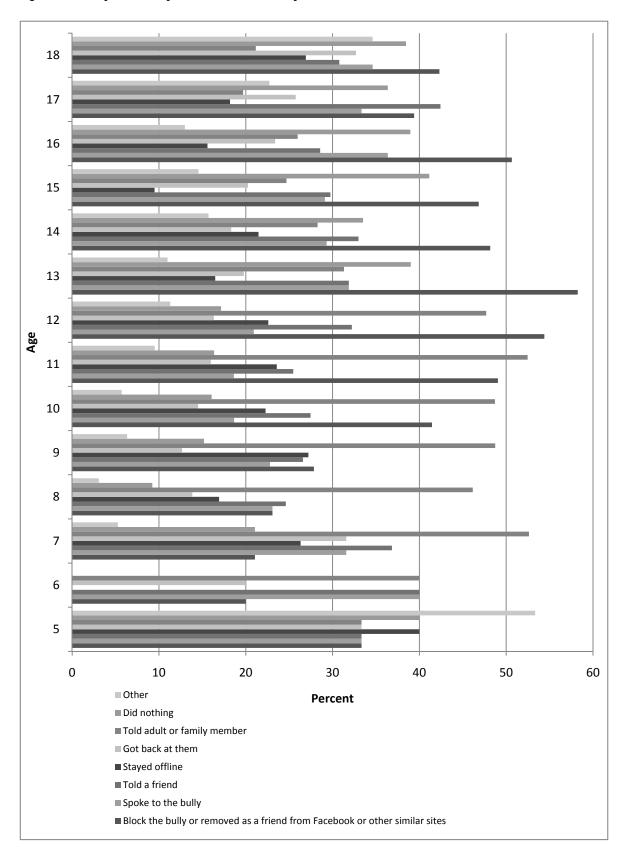
Figure 3.5    If you were cyber-bullied, what did you do?

Table 3.5    If you were cyber-bullied in the last 12 months, what did you do?

| | Sex | Blocked or removed bully as a friend % | # | Spoke to the bully/ Confronted the bully % | # | Told a friend % | # | Stayed offline % | # | Told an adult or family member % | # | Sought revenge or paid them back % | # | Did nothing/ Ignored it % | # | Other % | # |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 Years | M | 33.3 | 5 | 33.3 | 5 | 33.3 | 5 | 40.0 | 6 | 33.3 | 5 | 33.3 | 5 | 40.0 | 6 | 53.3 | 8 |
| | F | 44.4 | 8 | 44.4 | 8 | 44.4 | 8 | 44.4 | 8 | 38.9 | 7 | 44.4 | 8 | 55.6 | 10 | 44.4 | 8 |
| 6 Years | M | 20.0 | 1 | 40.0 | 2 | 40.0 | 2 | 0.0 | 0 | 40.0 | 2 | 20.0 | 1 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 |
| | F | 25.0 | 3 | 33.3 | 4 | 58.3 | 7 | 25.0 | 3 | 50.0 | 6 | 25.0 | 3 | 41.7 | 5 | 16.7 | 2 |
| 7 Years | M | 21.1 | 4 | 31.6 | 6 | 36.8 | 7 | 26.3 | 5 | 52.6 | 10 | 31.6 | 6 | 21.1 | 4 | 5.3 | 1 |
| | F | 6.3 | 1 | 31.3 | 5 | 43.8 | 7 | 25.0 | 4 | 37.5 | 6 | 6.3 | 1 | 18.8 | 3 | 6.3 | 1 |
| 8 Years | M | 23.1 | 15 | 23.1 | 15 | 24.6 | 16 | 16.9 | 11 | 46.2 | 30 | 13.8 | 9 | 9.2 | 6 | 3.1 | 2 |
| | F | 17.7 | 17 | 19.8 | 19 | 30.2 | 29 | 18.8 | 18 | 56.3 | 54 | 5.2 | 5 | 9.4 | 9 | 6.3 | 6 |
| 9 Years | M | 27.8 | 44 | 22.8 | 36 | 26.6 | 42 | 27.2 | 43 | 48.7 | 77 | 12.7 | 20 | 15.2 | 24 | 6.3 | 10 |
| | F | 28.6 | 52 | 24.2 | 44 | 34.6 | 63 | 30.8 | 56 | 60.4 | 110 | 1.6 | 3 | 15.4 | 28 | 7.1 | 13 |
| 10 Years | M | 41.5 | 80 | 18.7 | 36 | 27.5 | 53 | 22.3 | 43 | 48.7 | 94 | 14.5 | 28 | 16.1 | 31 | 5.7 | 11 |
| | F | 51.8 | 157 | 11.6 | 35 | 32.3 | 98 | 29.0 | 88 | 62.7 | 190 | 4.6 | 14 | 8.3 | 25 | 13.2 | 40 |
| 11 Years | M | 49.0 | 129 | 18.6 | 49 | 25.5 | 67 | 23.6 | 62 | 52.5 | 138 | 16.0 | 42 | 16.3 | 43 | 9.5 | 25 |
| | F | 55.1 | 216 | 16.6 | 65 | 34.2 | 134 | 24.7 | 97 | 64.3 | 252 | 4.3 | 17 | 7.4 | 29 | 16.1 | 63 |
| 12 Years | M | 54.4 | 130 | 20.9 | 50 | 32.2 | 77 | 22.6 | 54 | 47.7 | 114 | 16.3 | 39 | 17.2 | 41 | 11.3 | 27 |
| | F | 69.0 | 292 | 22.0 | 93 | 44.7 | 189 | 20.3 | 86 | 61.0 | 258 | 13.2 | 56 | 8.5 | 36 | 10.9 | 46 |
| 13 Years | M | 58.2 | 106 | 31.9 | 58 | 31.9 | 58 | 16.5 | 30 | 31.3 | 57 | 19.8 | 36 | 39.0 | 71 | 11.0 | 20 |
| | F | 59.1 | 230 | 28.0 | 109 | 44.7 | 174 | 17.2 | 67 | 42.9 | 167 | 9.8 | 38 | 36.5 | 142 | 13.1 | 51 |
| 14 Years | M | 48.2 | 92 | 29.3 | 56 | 33.0 | 63 | 21.5 | 41 | 28.3 | 54 | 18.3 | 35 | 33.5 | 64 | 15.7 | 30 |
| | F | 60.6 | 215 | 32.4 | 115 | 49.0 | 174 | 14.4 | 51 | 41.7 | 148 | 11.8 | 42 | 46.5 | 165 | 10.1 | 36 |
| 15 Years | M | 46.8 | 74 | 29.1 | 46 | 29.7 | 47 | 9.5 | 15 | 24.7 | 39 | 20.3 | 32 | 41.1 | 65 | 14.6 | 23 |
| | F | 56.8 | 154 | 33.6 | 91 | 39.5 | 107 | 15.5 | 42 | 38.7 | 105 | 11.8 | 32 | 45.4 | 123 | 10.7 | 29 |

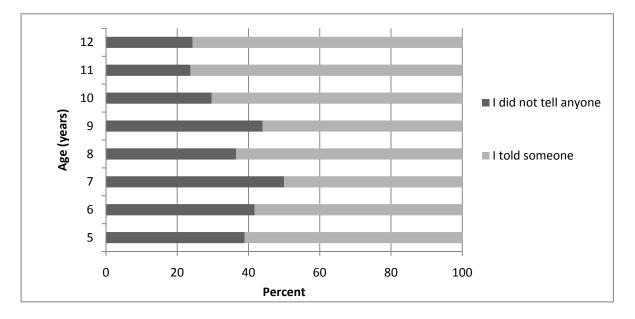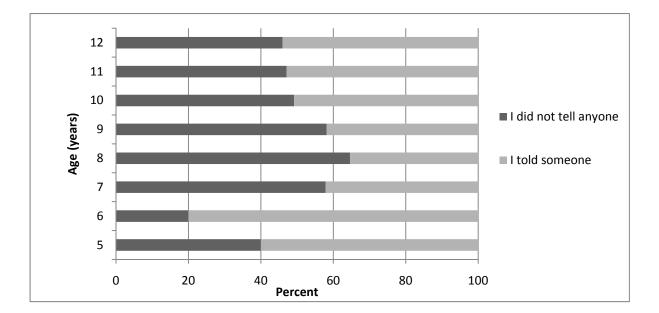| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 Years | M | 50.6 | 39 | 36.4 | 28 | 28.6 | 22 | 15.6 | 12 | 26.0 | 20 | 23.4 | 18 | 39.0 | 30 | 13.0 | 10 |
| | F | 55.0 | 88 | 33.1 | 53 | 46.9 | 75 | 13.8 | 22 | 37.5 | 60 | 7.5 | 12 | 47.5 | 76 | 10.6 | 17 |
| 17 Years | M | 39.4 | 26 | 33.3 | 22 | 42.4 | 28 | 18.2 | 12 | 19.7 | 13 | 25.8 | 17 | 36.4 | 24 | 22.7 | 15 |
| | F | 58.7 | 61 | 38.5 | 40 | 40.4 | 42 | 14.4 | 15 | 32.7 | 34 | 10.6 | 11 | 51.9 | 54 | 8.7 | 9 |
| 18 Years | M | 42.3 | 22 | 34.6 | 18 | 30.8 | 16 | 26.9 | 14 | 21.2 | 11 | 32.7 | 17 | 38.5 | 20 | 34.6 | 18 |
| | F | 48.0 | 24 | 40.0 | 20 | 32.0 | 16 | 30.0 | 15 | 24.0 | 12 | 42.0 | 21 | 36.0 | 18 | 28.0 | 14 |

Figure 3.6a  Of those cyber-bullied, did they tell someone *(Female, aged 12 years and younger)*



Figure 3.6b  Of those cyber-bullied, did they tell someone *(Male, aged 12 years and younger)*

Table 3.6a    If you were cyber-bullied, did you tell someone? *Aged 5-12 years)*

|  | Sex | I did not tell anyone | | I told someone | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | % | # | % | # |
| 5 Years | M | 40.0 | 5 | 60.0 | 9 |
|  | F | 38.9 | 7 | 61.1 | 11 |
| 6 Years | M | 20.0 | 0 | 80.0 | 4 |
|  | F | 41.7 | 3 | 58.3 | 7 |
| 7 Years | M | 57.9 | 9 | 42.1 | 8 |
|  | F | 50.0 | 5 | 50.0 | 8 |
| 8 Years | M | 64.6 | 23 | 35.4 | 23 |
|  | F | 36.5 | 26 | 63.5 | 61 |
| 9 Years | M | 58.2 | 81 | 41.8 | 66 |
|  | F | 44.0 | 67 | 56.0 | 102 |
| 10 Years | M | 49.2 | 84 | 50.8 | 98 |
|  | F | 29.7 | 71 | 70.3 | 213 |
| 11 Years | M | 47.1 | 110 | 52.9 | 139 |
|  | F | 23.7 | 78 | 76.3 | 299 |
| 12 Years | M | 46.0 | 97 | 54.0 | 129 |
|  | F | 24.3 | 93 | 75.7 | 320 |

**Figure 3.7    If you were cyber-bullied in the last 12 months, who did you tell?** *(Aged 13-18 years)*

Table 3.6b    If you were cyber-bullied in the last 12 months, who did you tell? *(Aged 13-18 years)*

| | Sex | I did not tell anyone % | # | I told my family % | # | I told my friends % | # | I told a teacher % | # | I told the police % | # | I told the manager of the website % | # | I told ACMA % | # | Other % | # |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 Years | M | 35.2 | 64 | 47.3 | 86 | 41.2 | 75 | 21.4 | 39 | 7.1 | 13 | 14.3 | 26 | 6.6 | 12 | 7.7 | 30 |
| | F | 19.3 | 75 | 53.7 | 209 | 64.5 | 251 | 25.7 | 100 | 4.6 | 18 | 6.7 | 26 | 2.6 | 10 | 14.9 | 58 |
| 14 Years | M | 34.6 | 66 | 37.7 | 72 | 47.6 | 91 | 19.4 | 37 | 13.6 | 26 | 11.5 | 22 | 8.4 | 16 | 8.7 | 31 |
| | F | 20.3 | 72 | 48.5 | 172 | 66.8 | 237 | 23.9 | 85 | 5.1 | 18 | 6.2 | 22 | 1.1 | 4 | 9.9 | 35 |
| 15 Years | M | 43.0 | 68 | 33.5 | 53 | 41.8 | 66 | 14.6 | 23 | 7.0 | 11 | 8.9 | 14 | 5.1 | 8 | 7.4 | 20 |
| | F | 15.1 | 41 | 50.6 | 132 | 67.2 | 182 | 20.7 | 56 | 4.1 | 11 | 3.7 | 10 | 0.4 | 1 | 8.9 | 24 |
| 16 Years | M | 41.6 | 32 | 29.9 | 23 | 46.8 | 36 | 14.3 | 11 | 7.8 | 6 | 13.0 | 10 | 6.5 | 5 | 6.9 | 11 |
| | F | 18.8 | 30 | 47.5 | 76 | 68.8 | 110 | 17.5 | 28 | 8.1 | 13 | 4.4 | 7 | 0.6 | 1 | 11.3 | 18 |
| 17 Years | M | 36.4 | 24 | 24.2 | 16 | 47.0 | 31 | 21.2 | 14 | 16.7 | 11 | 15.2 | 10 | 10.6 | 7 | 13.5 | 14 |
| | F | 20.2 | 21 | 44.2 | 46 | 65.4 | 68 | 22.1 | 23 | 6.7 | 7 | 2.9 | 3 | 1.9 | 2 | 6.7 | 7 |
| 18 Years | M | 46.2 | 24 | 32.7 | 17 | 40.4 | 21 | 17.3 | 9 | 25.0 | 13 | 23.1 | 12 | 21.2 | 11 | 40.0 | 20 |
| | F | 54.0 | 27 | 36.0 | 18 | 36.0 | 18 | 16.0 | 8 | 28.0 | 14 | 20.0 | 10 | 24.0 | 12 | 28.0 | 14 |

3.105    The coping strategies of respondents aged 13 years or older were not substantially different to their younger counterparts: reaching out to friends and family remain high in this age group.

3.106    Differences existed on the rate of seeking revenge, ignoring the bullying and staying offline. The rate of retaliation among male respondents was higher (23.8 percent) in males aged 13 or older sought revenge compared with 12.7 percent of males aged 12 or younger.

3.107    Another difference was the rate of ignoring the bullying behaviour: 37.9 percent of males and 44.0 percent of females aged 13 years or older reported ignoring the bully.

3.108    Finally, the rate of staying offline as a coping strategy declined in the older age category: 18.1 percent of males aged 13 or older, 17.6 percent of

females aged 13 or older compared to 22.4 percent of males aged 12 or younger; 27.25 percent of females aged 12 years or younger.

3.109    The Australian Institute of Family Studies stated that common coping techniques used by young people experiencing cyber-bullying include denying the seriousness of the experience, avoiding the perpetrator, and acting aggressively towards others online.

- Most young people are reluctant to seek help or tell an adult about their Cyberbullying victimisation. One of the reasons cited for their reluctance is a fear that their access to technology will be taken from them (e.g., that their parents might confiscate their mobile phone or take away their Internet access).
- The use of problem-solving strategies, characterised by organising a plan of action to deal with the issue while remaining optimistic, may lead to de-escalation, while passive coping puts young people at risk of future victimisation.[125]

3.110    The BoysTown study argued that its findings 'highlight that a critical response to effectively addressing cyberbullying relies on both increasing the help-seeking behaviour of victimised young people and improving the efficacy of those they speak to. While evidence suggests that cyberbullying presents its own unique set of characteristics, it is also important to recognise that it is strongly interrelated with traditional bullying. This suggests a need for interventions that focus on improving peer relations in general'.[126]

> Cyberbullying is bullying. It is a complex, deeply embedded social relationship problem. I think the solutions need to look at both prevention and intervention. This calls for legal solutions, for technological solutions, for educational solutions delivered by both the parents and the schools, for more training for preservice teachers and for public health campaigns, but we have no evidence that any of them might work.[127]

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125    Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Submission 39*, pp. 3-4, citing Lodge J and Frydenberg E, 2010, 'Cyber-bullying' in D J Christie (Ed) *Encyclopaedia of peace psychology*, New Jersey, Wiley Blackwell.

126    Price M and Dalgleish J, 2010, 'Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people', Y*outh Studies Australia*, 29 (2): 51-59.

127    Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS6.

> i think the thing that we can address is how people RESPOND to bullying. it is much easier to ignore it and to delete that person from your fb, than to respond and get in a fight, but it seems that too often people chose to respond and get themselves into a mess. the bully wants a reaction so bullying would decrease if people didn't respond. other things people need to know about is not to add strangers onto their fb. ALL my friends i know of have added 100+ strangers. also not to 'meet' people online. if something serious happens, people should not be too embarrassed to go straight to their parents or teachers or in some cases police.[128]

3.111  Research by BoysTown has shown that:

> ... young people used a number of offline and online strategies to address cyber-bullying. The majority of cyber-bullied young people blocked the bully (71%); many of them also decided to remove the bully as a friend (46%) and to confront the bully (44%); almost 40% decided to tell a friend; 32% opted to stay offline or stopped looking at the offending messages or images; and 44% decided to tell an adult (based on individual responses).[129]

3.112  Researchers at Simon Fraser University in Canada found that 74 percent of victims of 'cyberspace infractions' would tell their friends, and 57 percent would tell their parents. Only 47 percent would tell school officials, and 'almost no one' would tell police. About 27 percent of victims would report cyber-bullying to schools, as opposed to 40 percent who would report that they had witnessed it.[130]

3.113  The following comments were made by respondents in response to various questions in the *Are you safe?* survey:

> I wasn't affected by the bullying so i didn't really care... I just let it go.  If that guy wants to be an idiot that's his choice (Female aged 14).
>
> because i confronted them, the school said, i was bullying them so i was suspended and they got off scott free (Female aged 16).
>
> I sent a report of their behaviour which resulted in them getting banned from the game (Male aged 14).

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128  Verity, *Submission 142*, p. 1.
129  BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p.10.
130  Simon Fraser University, *Submission 55*, p. 9.

> i spoke to the bully about it, that didnt get me far. i told my friends. then i removed the bully off of my facebook (Female aged 15).
>
> My mother saw it and told me why this was happening and i said i didnt know. She took my facebook away (Female aged 13).
>
> talked it over with my parents and they helped me decide what was the best thing to do or not to do (Female aged 15).
>
> We worked it out. We had both misunderstood each other. We calmed down and stopped acting so aggro, until it had all blown over (Female aged 16).

3.114   In the Simon Fraser University study, of the respondents who would not tell school personnel, 30 percent feared retribution from the cyber-bully. This finding appears to contravene much of the current literature which posits that young people are reluctant to report incidents to adults primarily out of fear that time on line will be reduced or taken away.[131]

3.115   The BoysTown study also reported the effectiveness of these strategies. Notably, 68.5 percent rated that telling a friend was helpful, and 67.5 percent found telling a parent or carer was helpful.

> What might have exacerbated the problem is that despite the serious emotional impacts of cyberbullying, over a quarter of victims did not seek support from others nor did they take any action to address the issue. This particular finding by BoysTown is supported by related literature showing that young people are rarely proactive in informing adults about being cyberbullied. In fact, one study found that as many as 90% of victims claimed to have not told an adult. Other studies have yielded similar findings, attributing the inhibition to fears of humiliation and embarrassment; not being believed; concerns about the incident being trivialised; and/or access to technology devices being restricted.[132]

3.116   An extensive research project in Western Australia spoke to nearly 1,000 young people aged between five and 18 years. It revealed that 38 percent

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131  Simon Fraser University, *Submission 55*, p. 9.

132  BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p. 10, citing Juvonen J and Gross E, 2008, 'Extending the school grounds? Bullying experiences in cyberspace', *The Journal of School Health*, 78 (9): p. 496; Campbell M, 2007, *Cyber bullying and young people: Treatment principles not simplistic advice*; Smith P, Mahdavi J, Carvalho M, Fisher S, Russell S and Tippett N, 2008, 'Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils', *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49 (4): 376-385.

of respondents did not have anyone to talk to about bullying, or preferred to keep problems to themselves. The latter response was 'considerably higher' among boys and young Indigenous people.[133]

## Bystanders

3.117   Research has recognised the important role of bystanders in bullying, and the role the peer group plays in reinforcing this behaviour. There are benefits in engaging bystanders to take a stand against bullying by intervening safely but directly, telling a trusted adult, or at least not encouraging the bully/bullies. Bystanders may be easy to influence because they often think that bullying is wrong and would like to do something to help the victim.[134]

3.118   Dr McGrath noted that there is:

> a reasonable amount of research which says not only that the children who are either bullying or being bullied are adversely affected by this kind of situation but that all students are affected. We have considerable and building evidence that the kids who witness bullying are, to some extent, as traumatised as the kids who are on the receiving end, to the point where we have studies which can demonstrate a negative impact[135]

3.119   The Australian Psychological Society emphasised the need for children and young people to be part of the solution because while cyber-bullying may occur privately, other students often know about it and thus have the option of intervening.[136] Converting existing attitudes into positive behaviour is a challenge, and young people need help in understanding their responsibility to intervene when bullying occurs.[137]

> Peer education and interventions are important in reducing the impacts of cyber-bullying. The majority of peer interventions have been found to be effective, with the bullying stopping within a short period of time of peer intervention and reconciliation occurring when bystanders intervened.[138]

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133  Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Submission* 54.1, pp. 1-2.

134  NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 26.

135  Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS9.

136  Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 90*, p. 19, citing Cross *et al*, 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University.

137  NSW Government, *Submission 94*, pp. 26-27.

138   Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 90*, p. 19, citing Cross *et al*, 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University.

3.120　Confident bystanders are important because bullies like an audience, whether it is online or at school, but they are most likely to stop when peers show disapproval. Evidence suggests that, when a peer or bystanders do intervene, bullying stops 'within ten seconds': much more quickly than if an adult does the same thing.  Education is required so that bystanders can be defenders, stand up for victims, or, if that is not possible, walk away to deprive the bully of attention.[139]

> Getting you as a bystander to help online is so much easier than if you were in a physical place and too scared to do something by yourself, even though you want to stand up for your friend. If your friend is being publicly humiliated in a chat room, by messaging or on a website, you can privately email or text them and say: 'This isn't good. I know everybody really doesn't say that about you. I'll see you tomorrow and we'll try and work something out.' If they get 10 messages from their peers that say that they know it is happening, we can utilise that technology and the young people to support each other.[140]

3.121　At the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence on 18 March 2011, ACMA promoted the following messages:

- Don't just stand by. Speak out!

- Protect and support your friends.

- Tell a trusted adult.[141]

3.122　It also staged a national *Cybersmart Hero* event, in which more than 1000 upper primary school students across the country took part in the event. This is an online activity for upper primary students addressing the responsibilities of bystanders, those in the best position to influence bullying and cyber-bullying.[142]

> Children need help understanding their social responsibility to intervene when bullying is taking place. For example:

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139　*acma(sphere*, Issue 62, April 2011, p. 6; Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell, School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS29; Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2011, p. CS28; Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS13. Professor Phillip Slee, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS14.

140　Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell: School of Learning and Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS29.

141　*acma(sphere)*, Issue 62, April 2011, p. 6

142　*acma(sphere)*, Issue 62, April 2011, p. 6.

- peers can be coached in taking a stand when bullying occurs;
- children and young people may need scripts for what to say and do to intervene in a positive way;
- adults need to establish conditions in which children feel responsible, and to encourage children to take the risk of speaking out against bullying;
- adults need to listen respectfully and respond with relationship solutions to empower children to act.[143]

One of the things that came out in our research is that kids just do not know where to go to. When they are cyberbullied—or when they are face-to-face bullied, but we are talking here about cybersafety—they feel humiliated, they feel embarrassed, they feel that they may be blamed for that behaviour because kids will internalise what happens to them. If something happens to them they will blame themselves for that. So, there is a whole range of barriers to them seeking help and then on top of that they do not know where to go to.[144]

## Who do victims tell?

3.123    The following comments were made by survey respondents in response to questions asking if they told anyone about their experiences:

> no tennager willingly goes to their parents to tell them they have been bullied online, ever! so something else, somehow, needs to happen to protect all these people from getting bullied (Female aged 15).
>
> I didn't tell anyone for about a month. But i eventually broke down and ended up telling mum because i couldn't take it anymore. I got depression because of this and didn't want to go to school, i took a whole week off school because I didn't want to be seen (Female aged 14).
>
> i only told my friends. but my dad somehow found out (and no it wasnt through my friends) (Female aged 15).
>
> i told no one but when my mum found out i started telling my family what was really going on (Female aged 15).

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143  NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 27.
144  Mr John Dalgleish, Manager, Strategy and Research, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS13.

3.124    In 2006, a project began to reduce cyber-bullying experienced by Indigenous children in the mid-west of the Murchison region in Western Australia. Community members, including children and young people spoke about what they called 'bullying', why they think it happens and how it feels to be Indigenous and bullied. This led to development of a website that provides evidence-based and culturally appropriate information on strategies for young Indigenous people, schools and families.[145] There is only limited knowledge of how young Indigenous Australians use technology for traditional and cultural purposes.

3.125    BoysTown is interested in exploring the use of technology for seeking help.[146] It has suggested that:

> the Australian Government work in collaboration with community services to develop an awareness raising strategy that targets children and young people to:
>
> a) Encourage them to speak out about cyberbullying and other cybersafety concerns to trusted adults and;
>
> b) Informs them about available services that can assist in ameliorating the impacts of cyberbullying and other cybersafety issues and in particular, in view of their effectiveness, telephone and online counselling resources'.[147]

3.126    Two additional matters should be noted.

3.127    Ms Robyn Treyvaud expressed the view that because of the technological focus, there was not enough emphasis on decisions enhancing lives, friendships, or acquisition of information. She referred to a 'moral compass', the test for which was what an individual did when no one else was watching. Thus, young people are not watched at their computers and no one holds them responsible for their actions. Much anti-social and mean behaviour is driven by whether perpetrators think that they are likely to be caught.[148]

> In many cases, children who bully others are asserting their social power and have learned to use that power aggressively. The challenge is to redirect this leadership potential from the negative strategies of bullying to positive leadership skills and

145  Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS5.

146  Mr John Dalgleish, Manager, Strategy and Research, BoysTown, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS19.

147  BoysTown, *Submission 29*, p. 12.

148  Ms Robyn Treyvaud, Founder, Cyber Safe Kids, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS35.

> opportunities. These children require support to find positive
> ways of gaining power and status within their peer
> relationships. They need to be provided with formative rather
> than punitive consequences. Interventions should provide a
> clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build
> awareness, skills, empathy and insights and provide appealing
> alternatives to bullying.[149]

3.128 The Alannah and Madeline Foundation saw cyber-bullying as a matter of personal behaviour, rather than of the misuse of applications in the online environment. It believed that responses to the problem were best focused on changing behaviour in schools and beyond. These were most effective when developed collaboratively, involving the victim, his/her school, the perpetrator(s), parents/carers, appropriate representatives of the online environment and the wider community. This whole-of-community approach will be addressed in Chapter 10.[150]

> The critical factor is that with bullies we have a small percentage
> who continue, no matter what we do, and those young people
> may go on to other antisocial or deviant pathways.[151]

3.129 The NSW Government commented that, given the vulnerabilities of children in out-of-home care, an interagency response may be required, regardless of whether the person is a victim or a perpetrator.[152]

3.130 The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition stated that:

> A coordinated approach is adopted so that young people, parents
> and schools are involved in the process of raising awareness of
> risks and developing measures to counter inappropriate
> behaviours online.[153]

3.131 Professor Phillip Slee suggested the use of the available technology to send out anti-bullying messages.[154]

> I think a lot of young people were well aware of the well-
> publicised risks like cyberbullying and those sorts of things, but a

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149 NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 26.

150 Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 19; Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS5.

151 Dr Barbara Spears, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS14.

152 NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 29.

153 Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Submission 28*, p. 7.

154 Professor Phillip Slee, Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS17.

lot of young people were not really aware of what happens to their information once it is put online. They are not aware that other people can access their information. They view their Facebook profile as their personal space and do not realise that others can access it, and the longevity of that—something they say in the heat of the moment can be there forever. I think that was the biggest thing that came through around their understanding of it.[155]

bullies from other schools, there are ways and means of dealing with that, if the bullying constitutes significant harm. There are always friendly agreements between neighbouring principals.[156]

3.132    Professor Bjorn Landfeldt commented that:

there is definitely a place for law enforcement agencies, but it should not really get that far. If it gets that far it would be a very unusual case, I would assume. I would assume that in most cases it is something that goes on in the school environment or between students in a school, and the local community, the immediate community, should be able to deal with it. If they are not able to deal with it, they should have clear guidelines on how to deal with it. If they cannot, maybe they should escalate it to law enforcement agencies but also have definite and clear guidelines and responsibilities for law enforcement agencies, if they get such a matter tabled.[157]

3.133    The Australian Institute of Criminology pointed out that there is 'relatively little' research on how young people, or their parents/carers, deal with or respond to risks in the online environment.[158] It believed that research tended to focus on the incidence of the abuse rather than on its consequences, such as coping strategies or the long-term effects of exposure to risks.[159] Yahoo!7 also commented that 'research into the prevalence and scale of online safety risks would greatly inform and shape the debate around which safety measures would be more effective in managing these risks.[160]

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155    Mrs Tiffany Downing, Director, Office of Youth, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS19.

156    Mr Michael Wilkinson, Executive Secretary, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS28.

157    Associate Professor Bjorn Landfeldt, University of Sydney, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 March 2011, p. CS30.

158    Australian Institute of Criminology, *Submission 56*, p. 13.

159    Ms Samantha Yorke, Legal Director, Yahoo!7, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 July 2010, p. CS23.

160    Yahoo!7, *Submission 2*, p. 2.

3.134 Dr Julian Dooley commented that the first empirical trial has been set up to examine the effectiveness of resources devoted to cyber-bullying work, and to determine whether messages schools and parents/carers are asked to deliver are enhancing cyber-safety. However, one of the challenges to increasing cyber-safety in Australia is that, except to an extent on cyber-bullying and some work on what is sometimes known as 'Internet addiction', little other research is being carried out.[161] There is a considerable focus on some online abuses, while others such as 'required' fields in documents have received little attention. This abuse has implications for the collection of unnecessary personal information.[162]

3.135 Some schools in the United Kingdom have introduced peer mentoring for students in relation to cyber safety matters. In the British system, fellow students, in a model similar to school prefects, are identified as being able to assist others with cyber-safety issues.

**Recommendation 3**

**That the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Minster for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth work with the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth and the Australian Communications and Media Authority to investigate the feasibility of developing and introducing a cyber-safety student mentoring program in Australian schools.**

## Committee comments

3.136 While there are no specific sanctions for cyber-bullying in most Australian jurisdictions, the more serious cyber-bullying activities will often contravene other relevant legislation. These sanctions are dealt with in Chapter 11.

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161 Dr Julian Dooley, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS39.
162 Victorian Privacy Commissioner, *Submission 59*, p. 4.