SNAPSHOT

How research on cyberbullying has developed

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The topic of cyberbullying is often in the media, because of the distress and harm it can cause. There have been cases where it appears to have contributed significantly to tragic outcomes such as suicide (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). According to Sheri Bauman, the earliest use of the term dates back to a New York Times article in 1995. But it took a few years to catch on. Probably the earliest website was created by Bill Belsey in 2003, at www.cyberbullying.ca. That website is still there (and claims to have made the first definition of cyberbullying) but now it is joined by many others.

Research on the topic started in the early years of this century, first in North America. For example Michele Ybarra reported on internet harassment. An analysis by Fethi Berkkun and myself (Smith & Berkkun, 2017) used the Web of Science database to extract details of articles on cyberbullying. This shows how the number of articles has built up from a very slow start during the early years of this century to a rapid increase. The year 2015 saw 131 articles, or about 2.5 new articles every week, and this shows no signs of abating. We also found that for the first decade, the majority of research came from North America, but in recent years the European countries have produced the most research, perhaps stimulated by the possibility of EU funding.

In Europe, a relatively early study by myself and colleagues (Smith et al., 2008) described the nature and prevalence of cyberbullying at that time. Until then, most cyberbullying was by emails, or by text messages or prank calls on mobile phones. Smart phones were yet to come. But the next few years saw modes of cyberbullying change dramatically. Many young people started to use smart phones to access the internet. They also started to use services such as instant messaging and a variety of social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter became very popular. Apart from internet gaming, social networking appears to be somewhat more prevalent in girls than boys, and cyberbullying experiences too seem at least relatively more common in girls, compared to what is now called 'traditional', or offline bullying.

Obviously, cyberbullying is an international issue. Although coping and resilience vary, it clearly can have a very negative effect. Debate is ongoing about definition (should we use the term cyber-aggression?), the extent of overlap with traditional bullying, and how best to help schools and young people (where the problem seems most acute). Campbell and Bauman (2018) provide a compendium of international contributions, on what can be done.

For the full length article, please visit http://bit.ly/2hM1Veq

Key Practitioner Messages

- Being a victim of cyber attacks or cyberbullying can cause great distress and harm – as much or more than traditional bullying

- Children with pre-existing vulnerabilities will be more at risk of harm; those with better digital skills and more social support are likely to cope better

- Parents have a role in being interested in and monitoring young people's internet use, without being too intrusive

- Schools should mention cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policy, and cover internet safety issues through the curriculum

- Many websites provide useful advice – see for example the Anti-Bullying Alliance website at **https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/cyberbullying-0**