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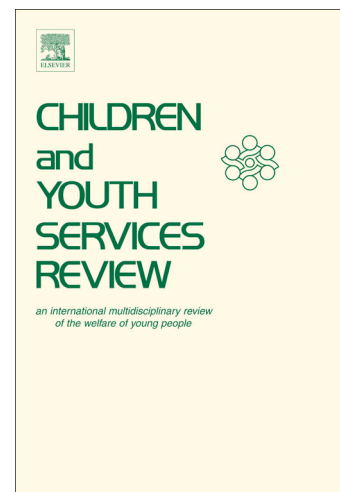
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Cyberbullying: Roles of School Psychologists and School Counselors in Addressing a Pervasive Social Justice Issue

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Abstract

School psychologists and school counselors can act as agents of social justice in schools to prevent cyberbullying, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. Cyberbullying is an emerging form of bullying that has shown an alarming increase in society within the last decade and in schools as microcosms of society. Cyberbullying among K-12 students has adverse social, physical, and emotional impacts for victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Advocacy for prevention, intervention, and more effective policies from school psychologists and counselors is of paramount importance for student and school community well-being and safety. This article provides an overview of cyberbullying in schools as a social justice issue; explores advocacy, ethical, and practitioner roles of both school psychologists and school counselors to address this issue among students in schools; discusses empirically based psychotherapy techniques for intervention and risk assessment; and offers policy and practice options to address cyberbullying.

Keywords: bullying, cyberbullying, K-12 students, school psychologists, school counselors

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Cyberbullying as a Social Justice Issue

Schools often are microcosms of larger society, mirroring social justice issues and challenges among students and school communities. As Jamaican educator Janette Fuller (2015) espoused, “The school and the society are therefore one and the same. . . . The school is society, a tiny replica. The problems that are identified in the schools are the same problems that are existent in the wider society” (para. 12). Cyberbullying is a social justice issue because, similar to traditional bullying, it involves a power imbalance (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014) and is frequently aimed at students who are different from the mainstream culture (Herrera, Kupczynski, & Mundy, 2015; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2019). Davison and Stein (2014) found that children from low-socioeconomic-status families were 3 times more likely to be bullied online. Vulnerable populations are common victims of cyberbullying, including students with neurodevelopmental disorders (Beckman, Hellstrom, & von Kobyletzki, 2019) or nontraditional sexual orientation (Duarte, Pittman, Thorsen, Cunningham, & Ranney, 2018). Kowalski and Toth (2018) found significantly higher rates of cybervictimization among students with disabilities. As such, prevention of cyberbullying among these populations is required by civil rights laws (NASP, 2019).

The advent of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, and e-mail has expanded accessibility and communication options. Although technological advancements have many positives, adverse effects include harassment, aggressive talk and gossip, insults, and verbal attacks on virtual platforms. These are examples of cyberbullying. “Cyberbullying is any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort to others” (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278). Most researchers (e.g., P. Smith et al., 2008; Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker, & Perren, 2013) have used Olweus’s (1993) classic definition of bullying as being repeated, over time, to victims who cannot defend themselves, adding the technological element as well as potential anonymity. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) defined cyberbullying

as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (p. 152). Barkoukis, Lazuras, Ourda, and Tsorbatzoudis (2016) explained,

Accordingly, cyberbullying rests on mastery of technology rather than physical strength: thus, perpetrators do not necessarily need to be physically stronger than their victims. Depending on the specific incident, the witnesses of cyberbullying may range from a small group of people (e.g., classmates who share text messages through mobile phones), to large audiences comprising thousands of internet users (e.g., a humiliating video posted in a video-sharing site and viewed by the site’s users). (p. 114)

Menesini and Nocentini (2009) agreed that any definition of cyberbullying must take into account the ability of the victim to block the attack, the frequency, and the intention of the perpetrator, while acknowledging that definitions will probably vary across cultures and age groups.

Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying involves a power imbalance, whether physical, social, technical, relational, or psychological (Davison & Stein, 2014; Kowalski et al., 2014). Anonymity provides a psychological power imbalance (Kowalski et al., 2014). Slonje and Smith (2008) defined cyberbullying as an intentional and aggressive behavior or act repeatedly carried out by an individual (or group) against others who cannot easily defend themselves, using electronic tools such as social networks, e-mail, and cellphones. Davison and Stein (2014) included power imbalance in their definition as well: “Cyberbullying is reported as an aggressive, intentional act distributed by an individual or group, using contact in an electronic medium, continuously and relentlessly against someone who cannot stand up for himself or herself easily” (p. 595).

Role of School Psychologists and School Counselors

As mental health professionals, school psychologists and school counselors can play vital roles through collaborative leadership to institute effective prevention and intervention strategies and programs to address cyberbullying. According to the NASP (2019), school psychologists have not only an ethical

but also a legal responsibility to prevent bullying. As bullying targets vulnerable populations, an insufficient school response to bullying qualifies as a civil rights violation (NASP, 2019). Professionals are encouraged through ethical guidelines and advocacy calls to promote policies and practices in schools that will address cyberbullying as a social justice issue detrimental to students and school communities. Specific interventions and strategies school psychologists and mental health counselors can implement are discussed later in this paper. The professional organizations for both school psychologists and school counselors, the NASP and the American School Counselor Association (2016), have given clear guidelines of both advocacy and ethics to address bullying and cyberbullying. School-based mental health professions recognize that any kind of bullying and relational aggression “are forms of school violence that can jeopardize the psychological and emotional well-being of children and adolescents and encourage school psychologists to take a leadership role in developing ways to reduce school violence” (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008, p. 694). The NASP stated,

Cyberbullying or electronic aggression is also a public health issue that is creating unique and difficult challenges for school personnel. The High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey also indicated that 14.9% of students reported being victims of some form of cyberbullying. . . . Researchers have found that 27% of youth who were victims of cyberbullying have also carried a weapon to school. (p. 2)

Schools have become a top priority with regards to providing evidence-based practices for mental health concerns (Splett & Maras, 2011), including those linked to school safety jeopardized by cyberbullying.

Prevalence of Cyberbullying

Given possible cultural differences in describing bullying and a scarcity of longitudinal studies, it is difficult to pinpoint whether bullying is increasing, but most data support that cyberbullying rates are increasing. Among vulnerable populations, cyberbullying is prevalent. Beckman et al. (2019) studied cyberbullying in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Australia, reporting up to 41% of students

with neurodevelopmental disorders were victims. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) reported 33% of U.S. middle school students and 30% of high school students reported being cyberbullied the previous year. Other sources (Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic, & Salame, 2015; National Cyber Security Alliance, 2016) have reported cyberbullying rates of 20–40% among adolescents. Sevcikova and Smahel (2009) found that the highest proportion of aggressors occurs among younger students (12 to 15 years old) and the next highest are those students from 16 to 19 years old.

Gender appears to play a role in rates of cyberbullying. In a UK study, Ackers (2012) surveyed 325 student respondents, finding that 16% of the females and 8% of the males had been cyberbullied. Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) found reports of cyberbullying higher among girls than boys (18.3% vs. 13.2%). Rice et al. (2015) also reported that girls were more likely to be perpetrator-victims of cyberbullying. Low and Espelage (2013) found no gender differences at younger ages, but by middle school, females had higher levels of cyberbullying. Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, and Solomon (2010) found that older girls were more likely to be cybervictims than older boys, but that the boys were more likely to be threatened.

Given the increasing rates, cyberbullying has become an educational concern both nationally and internationally (Herrera et al., 2015). The potential anonymity of the assault, the potential size of the audience, and the ability to cyberbully at any time of day or night indicate that cyberbullying has the potential to be far more pervasive and create more emotional harm than traditional bullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Sprague, 2014). Because cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon, researchers are trying to keep up with its spread and potential for causing harm not only to individuals but also to entire school systems. The decrease in traditional bullying around the world has been attributed to the implementation of antibullying programs and laws (Rigby & Smith, 2011). Thus, similar measures must be taken against cyberbullying.

Studying Cyberbullying

Although the concept of cyberbullying is still in its infancy, a relatively robust vocabulary has been created to describe the phenomenon, including words and phrases such as *flaming*, *cyber harassment*, *cyberstalking*, *denigration*, *masquerading*, *outing*, *trickery*, and *exclusion* (Espelage, Hong, & Valido, 2018). The sheer number and nuanced meanings of the words suggest that scholars have given the topic a lot of thought. Hamby, McDonald, and Grych (2014) called cyberbullying “as much a research trend as it is a media darling” (p. 3). Canadian writer Bill Belsey is credited with coining the term *cyberbullying* in the late 1990s, roughly coinciding with the time a second generation of portable communication devices became available to a majority of young people (Donegan, 2012).

Social implications. Before cyberbullying became possible, studies by Norwegian Dan Olweus had convinced people that bullying was not just a phase, but a criminal justice problem. His 8-year study found that “bullying in early adolescence strongly predicted later criminality” (Olweus, 2011, p. 151). Earlier, Olweus (1993) found that 70% of middle school bullies had been convicted of a crime by the age of 24. Bender and Lösel (2011) replicated Olweus’s findings, suggesting that bullying is a predictor of nearly all antisocial outcomes, with physical bullying more predictive than verbal or indirect bullying; victimization was not a predictor.

M. Smith (2004) reiterated that bullying in schools can lead to “bullying in the workplace, the home, prisons, and sporting events as well as stalking” (p. 43). Consequently, bullying can cost organizations “billions of dollars through absenteeism, turnover, and legal actions” (Ferris, 2009, p. 174). Because of bullying, society bears the burden of increased health care costs, police costs, and court costs (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

Power imbalance. A power imbalance can be somewhat difficult to assess off line, as it can be social (including financial), psychological, or physical, concepts that are not always discernable at first glance (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009). Sticca et al. (2013) observed that power imbalances can be more difficult to assess online, where someone with even limited skills can post a photo while remaining

anonymous. Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) used real-life power criteria, such as physical strength and age, as well as criteria related to information and communications technology, such as technological knowledge and anonymity, to assess power imbalance. Vulnerable populations are more susceptible to cyberbullying. Davison and Stein (2014) also found that children of low socioeconomic status are 3 times more likely to be bullied online.

Cyberbullying compared with traditional bullying. Two types of traditional bullying exist: direct and indirect. Significantly, cyberbullying merges aspects of both types: the name calling and threats of direct bullying, and the spreading of rumors and social exclusion of indirect bullying (Aricak et al., 2008). Studies of the consequences of cyberbullying have confirmed little difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Even given the “anonymity of the perpetrator and the continuity of the message,” Dehue (2013) found little evidence that “the effects of online antisocial behavior are more severe than the effects of face-to-face antisocial behavior” (p. 3). Bauman and Newman (2013) also found in a study of 788 university students that the form of bullying (online or off) was not a distinguishing feature for the amount of distress caused by the bully. Significant gender differences were found, however, with women reporting more stress from bullying. Given that some studies have found online bullying in general reduces empathy (Dooley et al., 2009), in a case in which a male bully is victimizing a female online, the male may be even more oblivious to the pain he is causing, since males in general feel less stress from online harassment. Bauman and Newman concluded, “It appears that the emotional distress caused by victimization is a function of the nature of the specific incident, rather than the method of delivery” (p. 34).

Ortega-Ruiz et al. (2012) also found that direct bullying and cyberbullying by mobile phone and indirect bullying and using the Internet to bully someone showed similar emotional impact profiles on the victims. A study of younger victims in Belgium found similar results, with focus groups suggesting that the behavior was more important than the medium (Dooley et al., 2009). A similar finding was noted by Sticca et al. (2013) among Swiss youth. Although cyber scenarios of bullying were generally perceived as

worse than traditional ones, public scenarios of any kind were rated worse than private ones. Sticca et al. concluded that the “role of the medium is secondary to the role of publicity and anonymity when it comes to evaluating bullying severity” (p. 739).

Whereas Davison and Stein (2014) found in a study of German students that those who were cyberbullied felt less anger than those who were traditionally bullied, some research has indicated cyberbullying, especially for younger victims, can have a greater impact than traditional bullying. In their 2008 study of Massachusetts students in Grades 9–12, Schneider et al. (2012) found reports of depressive symptoms were highest among victims of both types of bullying (47%), followed by cyber-only victims (33.9%) and school-only victims (26.6%), compared with 13.6% of nonvictims. Of even more concern, victims of both cyberbullying and off-line bullying were 5 times more likely than nonvictims to attempt suicide (Schneider et al., 2012). Although Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, and Ferrin (2012) found in their research that the effects of cyberbullying were very similar to the effects of traditional bullying, they concluded that cyberbullying could be “potentially more harmful” (p. 354). In their article on risk factors associated with cyberbullying, Dredge, Gleeson, and de la Piedad Garcia (2014) reported on numerous studies suggesting the impact of cyberbullying is more severe than traditional bullying. Their own interviews of 25 adolescents 15 to 24 years old supported the previous work in several cases: when the bully is unknown, when the bully is a friend, or when a large number were suspected of seeing the bully’s handiwork. Dooley et al. (2009) also found in focus groups from Belgium that not knowing the bully often increased feelings of powerlessness. In contrast, Slonje and Smith (2008) found that, among 360 adolescent Swedes, e-mail and text message bullying was less harmful than traditional bullying precisely because victims did not know who the bully was.

Researchers have speculated that cyberbullying potentially may have a greater impact than traditional bullying for several reasons. Notably, those who are bullied off-line can find safety in their homes; in contrast, online bullies can be active 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can reach through walls to target victims (Dooley et al., 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, &

Comeaux, 2010). Baek and Bullock (2014) suggested that cyberbullying can lead to tardiness, truancy, aggression, substance abuse, and suicide (although those who commit suicide often had other problems) and that “the emotional impact [of cyberbullying] has the potential to be more serious” than regular bullying (p. 230).

Impact on victims, bullies, and witnesses. Just as with traditional bullying, researchers have documented many negative outcomes from cyberbullying, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, sleep disorders, somatic symptoms, decreased school performance, absenteeism, truancy, dropping out of school, murder, and suicide (Kowalski et al., 2014; NASP, 2019). Ferris (2009) stated, “Bullying is associated with negative health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, headache, and musculoskeletal problems” (p. 174). In a study of 2,000 Finnish adolescents, Sourander et al. (2010) reported 22% of self-reported cybervictims felt unsafe, with those percentages rising if the bully was an adult or a stranger or if there was more than one bully. Craig and Pepler (2007) agreed that victims are at risk for “anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints” (p. 87).

Moreover, bullies are at risk for “long-term problems with antisocial behavior and substance use” (Craig & Pepler, 2007, p. 87), leading to sexual harassment and dating aggression, which “can extend to workplace harassment, as well as marital, child, and elder abuse” (p. 88). As with traditional bullying, cyberbullies complain of an array of problems similar to those cited by their victims (Sourander et al., 2010). Both groups suffer from binge drinking and drug abuse (Davison & Stein, 2014). Cyberbullies also report greater conduct problems, hyperactivity, and low prosocial behavior (Sourander et al., 2010), although those issues could be predictors rather than consequences of cyberbullying. The NASP (2019) reported bullying perpetration is associated with risk of carrying a weapon, substance abuse, and poor academic achievement.

Witnesses to bullying can suffer even more. In a study of more than 2,000 UK students aged 12 to 16, “observing bullying at school predicted risks to mental health over and above that predicted for those

students who were directly involved in bullying behavior as either a perpetrator or a victim” (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009, p. 211). In a study of Canadian students in Grades 4, 7, and 10, Holfeld and Mishna (2017) found witnessing cyberbullying was positively associated with being both a cyberbully or victim. The researchers addressed the importance of school counselors and psychologists recognizing the impact on witnesses. Bullying has seriously negative short- and long-term consequences on the victim, the bully, and witnesses.

Risk and predictive factors. Many predictive factors of cyberbullying are common with traditional bullying. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), in a survey of 84 students, found that almost all the cyberbullies were traditional bullies and vice versa. Ybarra and Mitchell (2007) found that cyberbullies were more likely to engage in off-line aggression as well. In a study of 1,700 German secondary school students, Katzer, Fetchenhauer, and Belschak (2009) found victims of traditional bullying also likely to be chatroom victims: “Results suggest that bullying in Internet chatrooms is not a phenomenon distinct from bullying in school” (p. 32). Victims of traditional bullying are likely to become targets of cyberbullying (Arslan, Savaser, Hallett, & Balci, 2012; Twyman et al., 2010).

However, the rise of cyberbullying can be linked to the increased amounts of time youth spend on social media. Rates of screen time are increasing dramatically around the world, not only in the United States. Over 90% of U.S. teenagers reported daily use of social media (Lenhart, 2015). Alvarez (2012) found that U.S. teenagers spent an estimated 7 hours per day using cell phones and computers; Lenhart (2015) reported 24% of teens were online nearly constantly. Davison and Stein (2014) reported on a Center for Digital Future survey that found adolescents spent 17 hours per week on the Internet. In a survey of 2,658 young people in the spring of 2015, Common Sense Media found that Black teens spent an average of 11 hours and 13 minutes each day with media; Hispanic teens, just over 9 hours; and White teens, 8 hours and 48 minutes. While some of that time is spent listening to music, nearly two thirds of the teens said watching television or texting while doing homework did not affect their ability to study and

learn, despite research to the contrary (Common Sense Media, 2015). Students said their parents talked to them about the content of what they watch, but not the amount (Common Sense Media, 2015).

These numbers are troubling, because research has suggested the one certainty about cyberbullies and victims is that they spend a lot of time online. P. Smith et al. (2008) found that U.S. cyberaggressors and victims used the Internet more than nonaggressors and nonvictims. According to Rice et al. (2015), cyberbully victims, perpetrators, and perpetrator-victims were more likely to report Internet use of at least 3 hours a day. Twyman et al. (2010) found that both victims and bullies reported being intense users of the Internet. Hinduja and Patchin (2008), in a survey of 1,378 adolescent Internet users, found that “computer proficiency and time spent online were positively related to both cyberbullying victimization and offending” (p. 130).

Ethnic minority students and students who texted at least 50 times a day also were more likely to report being victims (Rice et al., 2015). Among 181 undergraduates at a large midwestern U.S. university, Barlett (2015) found a positive correlation between cyberbullying and the frequency of instant messaging. In a study of 835 Swiss seventh graders, Sticca et al. (2013) found that traditional bullying, rule-breaking behavior, and frequency of online communication were risk factors for being an online bully, but that “experiences of victimization and intrapersonal characteristics were not found to increase the longitudinal risk of cyberbullying over and above antisocial behavior and frequency of online communication” (p. 52). Sticca et al. concluded, “Interpersonal characteristics and frequent online communication are the most prominent longitudinal risk factors for involvement in cyberbullying” (p. 64).

In a study of 1,023 students in Grades 5–7, Low and Espelage (2013) found that cyberbullying and off-line bullying shared risk and predictive factors. For example, a lack of empathy, bouts of depression, and the use of alcohol or drugs appeared to be associated with both online and off-line bullying. In longitudinal regression analyses, however, when risk and protective factors were considered simultaneously while controlling for race, gender, and previous bullying scores, the authors claimed the only overlap among predictors for traditional and online bullying was parental monitoring. The latter

finding is interesting but might be explained by the percentage of those being cyberbullied changing with age, so as the longitudinal study progressed, changes in rates occurred that affected the outcome.

The exact connection between Internet use and bullying needs further study. Aricak et al. (2008) explained the positive correlation by emphasizing the link between Internet use exposure to disturbing behaviors, with frequent users “becoming more vulnerable to the distress that comes with [that exposure]” (p. 258). P. Smith et al. (2008) even reported in their studies on UK students that cybervictims were more likely to use the Internet than cyberbullies. Katzer et al. (2009) embraced victimology theory to support a similar finding. In a survey of 1,700 German secondary school students, Katzer et al. found that just as off-line victims of bullying may frequent dangerous places, such as secluded parks, online victims were found to frequent “precarious sites,” such as extremist chatrooms (p. 32).

Social normalization of cyberbullying. Spears, Slee, Owens, and Johnson (2009) took either a more pragmatic or defeatist approach, depending upon one’s worldview. Just as traditional bullying may be deeply ingrained in capitalistic cultures (Donegan, 2012), Spears et al. suggested “cyberbullying could be a normative component for contemporary relationships as individuals navigate and inhabit social networking and video sharing worlds” (p. 194). Indeed, Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) found 279 youngsters in 53 focus groups to be more concerned about computer viruses and hacking than they were about pedophilic attempts and cyberbullying, and more concerned about spam than sexual intimidation and pornographic websites. Similarly, P. Smith et al. (2008) reported that many of the over 600 students they studied indicated that cyberbullying was just another form of online “entertainment” (p. 383). Given these attitudes, parents who purchase a cell phone for their child to protect the child might be surprised to find out the opposite may be true, “as many youths admit to utilizing their phones as an instrument for cyberbullying” (Donegan, 2012, p. 34).

Davison and Stein (2014) found a dangerous implication in their look at previous research on cyberbullying: “Society is beginning to not only accept, but expect, electronic communication behaviors that are emotionally and physically damaging” (p. 596). Olweus (2011) was not even sure cyberbullying

is a separate entity, observing that “to be cyberbullied or to cyberbully others seems to a large extent to be part of a general pattern of bullying, where use of the electronic media is only one possible form” (Kowalski et al., 2014, p. 1107).

Prevention, Risk-Assessment, and Intervention Strategies for School Psychologists and Counselors

Both school psychologists and school counselors must possess the clinical skills to work with individual students and groups of students in prevention and intervention of cyberbullying through delivery of counseling-based services: individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, program coordination, and consultation. These professionals possess the requisite skills to collaborate with other school staff and administration to develop and implement school policies that can effectively address cyberbullying behaviors among students. This section offers some examples of prevention and intervention strategies to address cyberbullying in schools, as well as possible policies.

Training for School Psychologists and Counselors

Schools are a unique category of organizations, in that they are responsible for both the physical and psychological safety of students as well of employees and the organization. Crises in schools can result in many psychologically traumatized children, and staff as well (Brock, 2013; Brock, Ballard, & Saad, 2013). As a distinct type of school crisis, cyberbullying requires not only substantially different school policy responses, but also qualitatively different skills and insights on the part of school personnel, especially school psychologists and counselors. School psychologists and school counselors must be prepared and trained to provide the most effective, proactive, evidence-based risk assessment and prevention and to prepare teachers and schools for crises associated with cyberbullying (Jimerson, Brock, & Pletcher, 2005). According to Reinke, Herman, and Tucker (2006), “Advances in prevention science during the past two decades have generated optimism that clinical interventions can reduce the prevalence and incidence of major mental disorders in society” (p. 313), including the prevention of cyberbullying.

To perform their roles effectively, school mental health staff must be able to recognize the warning signs of cyberbullying behaviors among both victims and perpetrators.

Awareness Programs for All Stakeholders

As classroom teachers and administrators are often the first point of contact between students and school mental health staff, a school's teachers must also be trained to recognize the signs of cyberbullying. According to Brock et al. (2013), school mental health staff should be responsible for delivering these training programs. Additionally, programs should be delivered to not only teachers, but parents and students as well. Both adults and students need to understand that electronic messages can last forever and can be traced. All parties could also benefit from information on the need to keep personal information private, as well as Internet safety and online etiquette rules. Farrington and Ttofi (2009) warned that prevention programs need to be "intensive and long-lasting in order to have an impact" (p. 324) and include such items as videos, peer intervention, and parent meetings. Awareness programs should define cyberbullying and explain how it works, share information on prevalence, and discuss the importance of the cyber world to many students. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Katzer et al. (2009) found that 40% of German students said their chat friends were just as important as their "real school friends" (p. 28). Awareness programs should cover the impact on victims and stress the need to take a stand against all bullying, including cyberbullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Students need to understand that they should report instances of cyberbullying whether they are the victim or a bystander; however, getting students to act on that message may not be easy. Ackers (2012) found that 63% of the UK students in his survey indicated they would tell their parents if they had been cyberbullied. An earlier study of what victims actually did revealed that 56% of UK victims of cyberbullying told someone (P. Smith et al., 2008). Worse, Alvarez (2012) reported that 82% of those sexually solicited online did not tell their parents.

In a study of 269 Canadian students, Li (2010) found that over 80% of students said they would not approach school staff about a cyberbullying problem because they would not be believed or because the staff could not do anything about it. Their fears may have some validity, according to Li's study, as just 1 in 6 victims reported that the bullying lessened after they reported it. Stauffer et al. (2012) found that in an urban high school in the western United States, 25% of the approximately 70 teachers surveyed felt that cyberbullying had no long-lasting impact, and about 60% of the teachers were not sure about the necessity of implementing antibullying programs. In a meta-analysis of prevention programs, Stauffer et al. found that "bully prevention programs produce minimal change" (p. 353). The reason for these failures could be the skepticism of American teachers and lack of buy-in, since other studies have indicated that antibullying programs in other parts of the world are successful (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

Aricak et al. (2008) speculated that students do not tell their parents about cyberbullying because their friends are more tech savvy and may have better advice or because friends are more important than families during adolescence. Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang (2011) found that victims did not report cyberbullying because they feared their parents would restrict their use of social media. Davison and Stein (2014) and Li (2010) also speculated that low reporting rates for harassment were tied to concerns about reduced Internet use.

Telling someone about cyberbullying is helpful to victims, however. Dredge et al. (2014) cited studies to show that people who seek support from significant others suffer less than those who engage in "avoidant coping strategies" and retaliation, which was also associated with more depressive symptoms (p. 288). In addition to the importance of telling someone, students should be warned to save evidence. Students need to be reminded not to respond to or engage the abuser. Dredge et al. suggested that students can take a break from the online world by unplugging or removing social media pages. Adults need to support the victim by providing as much assistance as possible in removing the offending information from online, a tactic that has been shown to help the victim (Dredge et al., 2014).

One of the most important steps school psychologists can take to help eliminate cyberbullying is to work with parents, since much of cyberbullying takes place outside of school. Ysseldyke et al. (2006) concluded, “School psychologists should be mental health practitioners who can guide parents and teachers in learning how to create an environment where ALL children and youth feel protected” (p. 13). Parents need to be made aware of the dangers of cyberbullying and be instructed in ways to monitor their children’s online activities. School psychologists, school counselors, and social workers can help parents develop the skills to talk with their children about this issue. Parents can be given lists of simple responses such as putting computers in places that are easily viewed by adults; installing filtering and tracking software to monitor children’s online activities; and setting clear expectations about the amount of time children spend online, including playing online games. Parents should make their children comfortable about reporting online abuse and learn about warning signs of a child being victimized by cyberbullies (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Support for the shared responsibility of schools and home in combating cyberbullying comes from Olweus’s work on traditional bullying. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (2015) is associated with reductions of 50% or more in bullying. Follow-up studies found reductions of 16% to 35% (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 106).

Specific Interventions

School psychologists and counselors can research packaged interventions currently being utilized in schools to increase awareness of and prevent cyberbullying (J. Jones & Augustine, 2015). Such curricula include Quality Circle Approach, Internet Safety Program, Cyber-bullying: A Prevention Curriculum, Sticks and Stones, and Let’s Fight It Together. Many antibullying programs applicable to the problem of cyberbullying have been around for enough time to study their effectiveness. Bradshaw (2015) looked at several such programs in the United States, Canada, and Europe and found that the programs on average reduced perpetration of bullying 20% to 23% and reduced victimization by 17% to 20%, although the more rigorously the study was evaluated, the less positive the results. In general, the programs were more effective in Europe than in either the United States or Canada. To be successful, the

research showed that programs must involve more than a single school-wide assembly. They also must involve families and communities, and the efforts must be sustained and integrated (Bradshaw, 2015). Programs that meet these criteria, such as the Good Behavior Game and the Coping Power Program, can have an impact on bullying (Bradshaw, 2015).

Bradshaw (2015) looked specifically at a Finnish KiVa Program that provided “classroom materials and discussions between students and teachers, peer support for student victims, disciplinary strategies, and information for parents to combat bullying. Computer games are also used to help students practice bullying prevention skills” (p. 324). The author came away with three observations. First, research is needed to test and isolate the successful critical components of bullying prevention programs. Second, like many other researchers, Bradshaw felt that a three-tiered system worked best, focusing on all students with some prevention programs; for children and youth placed at higher risk with a more intensive intervention program; and then, for those few students who exhibited consistent negative behavior, the most rigorous intervention. Finally, Bradshaw stressed that the biggest problem with evaluating programs was that “most programs lack valid, reliable, and efficient tools for tracking fidelity” (p. 330).

Sherer and Nickerson (2010) found similar results in a survey of antibullying practices. They reported that the least effective plans involved zero-tolerance policies and trying to keep the bully and victim apart, and the most effective dealt with the incidents immediately. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) presented the following guidelines:

1. Reach out to victims.
2. Set and enforce “clear rules and consequences for bullying behaviors” (p. 108).
3. Supervise students outside of the classroom on the school campus.
4. Engage students in classroom discussions about bullying to give victims a voice and to empower potential bystanders to intervene.

5. Engage parents and other adults, “making bullying a community issue that is addressed by community action” (p. 108).

School Cyberbullying Risk Assessment and Management

Documentation, education, and communication are vital to risk assessment and management. Schools can aid in the struggle against cyberbullying by installing tracker programs into school computers, making sure cyberbullying is included in school antibullying policies (L. Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2013), and making sure both students and parents know whom to contact in case of problems. School staff can work with parents to inform Internet service providers or mobile phone networks of breaches in policies. School counselors and other personnel can help students learn how to trace numbers, change e-mail addresses, and block bullies. School counselors can create teams to establish informal resolution strategies such as mediation between bully and victim, contacting a bully’s parents, and counseling victims. Prevention and risk-assessment programs also need to explain the local legal ramifications of cyberbullying.

Risk assessment is aided through communication with law enforcement and community services. In exploring best practices in bullying (and other violence) prevention, Larson (2008) argued, “Collaborative relationships with the mental health community, law enforcement, social services, or health providers can provide school personnel with alternative perspectives and open avenues to multiple-targeted prevention strategies” (p. 1293). Consistent with many other scholars of crisis management in schools (e.g., Rauskauskas, 2013), Larson described establishing effective communication channels as the essence of bullying and violence prevention.

Schools can also create their own programs, first by doing a needs assessment and forming a coordinating committee to set up a plan. The committee should include parents, teachers, students, and school health professionals (Liu & Graves, 2011), including mental health providers. The plan must include clear definitions, reporting procedures, and methods of addressing the problem, as well as

techniques such as increasing supervision and teaching bystanders what to do. Each adult plays a role in reducing bullying and recognizing that victims must be protected and supported (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

School psychologists and school counselors also should pay close attention to certain vulnerable groups at higher risk for bullying or cyberbullying. Education of risk assessment related to bullying is important for school counselors. The 2015 National School Climate Survey by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Christian Villenas, & Danischewski, 2015) found that 57.6% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students “felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation,” and 31.8% “missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable” (p. xvi). Notably, in the 2017 survey, students who reported a supportive school staff also reported lower percentages of feeling unsafe and missing school (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2017). A 2011 report by AbilityPath.org found that children with special needs rank among the highest of any other subgroup experiencing bullying. Besides nonheterosexual children and children with special needs, another group at significant risk for being bullied are children of low socioeconomic status (J. Jones & Augustine, 2015).

Psychotherapy

School psychologists and school counselors can also utilize psychotherapy techniques in preventative and intervention strategies. The NASP (2019) noted the use of individual therapy as the third tier in a multitiered system of support and bullying prevention. Rodkin, Espelage, and Hanis (2015) observed that because “bully victims” are the most likely to be maladjusted, those maladjusted youth who bully need services “that go beyond bullying-reduction programs . . . and social skills training” (p. 313). Because of problems with definitions and even the use of the word *bully*, “it is indeed possible that the most successful interventions will be those designed to reduce aggression and antisocial behavior more generally” (Rodkin et al., 2015, p. 317). Sticca et al. (2013) dove even deeper into the idea of empathy, indicating that traditional bullies showed low levels of affective empathy but understood their victims

were being bullied. Cyberbullies show low levels of both affective and cognitive empathy, suggesting they may not know victims feel bullied but have lower levels of global empathy, suggesting sociopathic tendencies. The Table highlights some useful psychotherapy techniques from professionals working with victims, bullies, and bystanders.

Prevention and School Culture

The NASP (2019) observed, “It takes an entire school community to create a healthy school climate where all students feel that they belong and are safe” (p. 1). Based on many years of research in bullying prevention, Nunn (2010) suggested that teaching children ways to avoid bullying works better than trying to stop the bullies. This approach may be more effective because peer-mediation strategies, group therapy, and conflict-resolution lessons rarely work with bullies, who usually work from a position of power imbalance, whereas most interventions work from an assumption of shared power (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Sherer and Nickerson (2010) found that school-wide positive behavior plans were one of the most effective means of preventing bullying. Whole-school approaches have been found to be the most effective means of preventing bullying, but not necessarily for identifying bullies and victims (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). These approaches address schools, bullies, and victims normatively, acting on a school’s climate that might support or enable bullying. Whole-school approaches may use several methods, including telephone hotlines and other anonymous reporting methods (Orpinas & Horne, 2006) and an antibullying curriculum (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Swearer & Espelage, 2004; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, & Hess, 2001).

Whitted and Dupper (2005) suggested that any successful strategy takes several years and works on various levels: changing overall culture of school, training teachers and other adults, and learning how to apply bullying-related risk assessment to target the bullies and victims for special treatment. Sercombe

and Donnelly (2013) stressed, “Interventions should always begin with the child or young person who is being bullied, and with what they want to happen” (p. 498).

The use of whole-school approaches, however, does not obviate the need for more focused interventions. Nation (2007) specified the need for both victim-inclusive and bully- or victim-focused interventions. Victim-inclusive approaches include restorative justice, class meetings, and bully courts. Bully- or victim-focused approaches include interventions using social learning theory (Bandura, 1997) to build resilience skills among victims and social skills among bullies, as well as counseling interventions, including interventions to empower bystanders and witnesses (NASP, 2019; Salmivalli, 2010). Raskauskas (2013) also discussed the benefits of support groups to provide emotional support and social skill development for victims, bystanders, and even the bullies themselves, so that behavior will be changed.

School Psychologists and Counselors as Change Agents

School psychologists and other school personnel must become change agents by creating awareness concerning the social problem of cyberbullying, assessing the problem, and promoting positive outcomes. According to Adamson and Peacock (2007), school mental health professionals, including school psychologists, are best positioned to counter bullying and cyberbullying in the schools. Further, school staff have a legal obligation to provide a safe school environment. School-based mental health professionals can educate administrators and teachers about the impact of cyberbullying and help implement prevention programs.

Researchers have determined that multilevel approaches are the best to deal with cyberbullying, reaching schools, communities, and individuals. School plans should include activities that involve the entire school, such as hiring more supervisors for playgrounds, bathrooms, cafeterias, and hallways. School plans might also include researching and disseminating information about local laws dealing with Internet abuse, including potential laws about cyberbullying. Schools also can implement cybersecurity

software to monitor student computer use. Plans need to set clear guidelines for Internet use in the schools, including the regulation of cell phones and other electronic mobile devices. Students can be taught how to save evidence and report instances of cyberbullying (Dredge et al., 2014). In order to accomplish this, students need to feel that adults will take them seriously and do something about the cyberbullying behavior (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Mental health professionals can present school-wide programs about ethical standards regarding cyberbullying. They can create programs to promote empathy as well as bullying prevention. Plans should focus on ways to involve all school personnel in the prevention of cyberbullying, including social workers and parents. School counselors should identify students vulnerable to cyberbullying because of their status (e.g., nonheterosexual students or students with disabilities) or because they spend great amounts of time online. Finally, school psychologists need to identify bullies and victims and create direct intervention programs for them, including long-term follow-up assistance. Teachers and counselors then can instruct potential victims on ways to block unwanted e-mails, instant messages, and texts from perpetrators. By acting as agents of change, school psychologists and counselors play a vital role in promoting social justice in schools and reducing the threat of cyberbullying.

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Table

Psychotherapy Tool and Counseling Activities Addressing Cyberbullying

Psychotherapy/ counseling tool	Benefit of use with victims	Benefit of use with perpetrators	Benefit of use with bystanders
Music therapy	Expression of fears, trauma	Decompressing	
Art therapy	Telling of trauma, restorying	Finding alternatives to aggression of others	
Creative writing, journaling	Telling of event, brainstorming self- advocacy strategies	Brainstorming alternatives	Brainstorming ways to advocate for others
Role playing, psychodrama	Practicing self- advocacy; assertiveness	Role reversal to develop deeper empathy	Practice advocacy
Play therapy	Telling the story		
Community and family genograms	Identifying supports	Identifying dysfunctional relationships, areas of intervention of negative behaviors	

Cyberbullying: Roles of School Psychologists and School Counselors in Addressing a Pervasive Social Justice Issue

Highlights

- Prevention of cyberbullying is a legal and ethical responsibility of school psychologists and counselors, who can act as agents of social justice.
- Cyberbullying is more prevalent among vulnerable populations: students with disabilities, of low socioeconomic status, and with nontraditional sexual or gender orientation.
- Cyberbullying negatively impacts not only victims but also bullies and witnesses.
- We offer cyberbullying risk and predictive factors as well as school risk-assessment and prevention strategies.
- We list empirically based psychotherapy techniques and a discussion of specific school interventions and strategies school psychologists and counselors can implement to prevent and address cyberbullying.

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