

Cyberbullying -- a growing problem

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Around 10 percent of all adolescents in grades 7-9 are victims of internet bullying.

'This type of [bullying](#) can be more serious than conventional bullying. At least with conventional bullying the victim is left alone on evenings and weekends', says Ann Frisé, Professor of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg.

'Victims of internet bullying - or cyberbullying - have no refuge. Victims may be harassed continuously via SMS and websites, and the information spreads very quickly and may be difficult to remove. In addition, it is often difficult to identify the perpetrator.'

Ann Frisé's research concerns body image, identity development and different types of bullying among [children](#) and adolescents. She is also part of an EU network of researchers studying cyberbullying and is since 1 January the national coordinator of this type of research.

'Cyberbullying occurs when new technologies such as computers and mobile phones are used to harass or bully somebody. The perpetrators often use SMS, e-mail, chat rooms and Facebook to spread their message.' One example of this is the Facebook group 'Vi som hatar Stina Johansson' (Those of us who hate Stina Johansson).

'This Facebook group was very difficult to remove. It took Stina's parents almost one whole month', says Frisé.

Who are the victims? 'Around 10 percent of all adolescents in grades 7-9 are victims of cyberbullying. There is a clear connection to school life - it usually calms down in the summer.

The perpetrator is almost always from the same school as the victim. 'It is a lot easier to be a perpetrator on the internet since it enables you to act anonymously. This also makes it possible for a weaker person to bully a stronger, which is uncommon in conventional bullying', says Frisé.

Blurring of boundaries is another important factor:

'In these contexts, people take liberties they normally wouldn't. For example, nobody would ever think of starting a magazine called "Those of us who hate Stina Johansson"'. So how can cyberbullying among children and [adolescents](#) be prevented?

Parents have an important role, according to Frisé:

'Adults shouldn't be so naive about what they put out about themselves on the internet, for example pictures. Kids get inspired by what adults do. In addition, it's good if parents show interest and ask their children to show them which sites they like to visit. But it's usually not a good idea to forbid them from visiting certain websites; they should instead teach them how to act when they are there.

'It is also important not to blame victimised children, since it's really not their fault. Our job is instead to help them end the harassment.' Frisé feels that people in Sweden generally are a bit naive when it comes to these issues:

'All school children in the UK are taught to "zip it, block it and flag it" - don't share information, block contacts and tell an adult!'

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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