

Bystanders key to tackling cyber-bullying epidemic

April 18 2018, by Shelley Hughes

Researchers looking into how to reduce cyber-bullying among school-age children are calling for workshops encouraging young people to morally engage with the issue to be introduced in schools.

The paper, which sites a massive increase in cyber-bullying by school pupils, examines why cyber-bullying messages go viral and what can be done to reduce the numbers of hostile messages between pupils circulating online.

Rather than addressing the behaviour of perpetrators or victims, the report is part of a growing focus on the behaviour of bystanders to online bullying – individuals who see, like or share abusive messages sent by others.

Lead author of the study and member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Bullying, Professor at the University of York, said "Abusive or hostile messages go viral because they are liked and shared – a spread initiated by people copied into the message. In this report we recommend methods to help [school](#) children to morally engage and feel that it is their duty to help tackle this concerning culture."

Cyber-bullying often takes the form of persistent hostile messaging, the sharing of embarrassing pictures or information online or the mass "unfriending" the person being bullied.

Peer pressure and a fear of becoming a victim themselves if they stand

up to the bully often contribute to bystanders taking part in the bullying rather than defending the victim or reporting the online abuse.

"In the virtual environment, it is easy for people to feel disengaged as they cannot see the impact on the victim in the way that you might in traditional forms of bullying," added Professor Kyriacou. "The idea behind our proposed workshops is to make cyber-bullying more socially unacceptable. Bullies thrive off of the social kudos that comes with going viral and the buzz of seeing their message spread."

Because of the rapidly changing nature of online culture, new issues surrounding cyber-bullying are arising all the time, making it difficult for the Government to keep pace with new forms of bullying "trending" among young people.

Schools are currently required by Ofsted to have a written statement on how they tackle bullying and the researchers are calling for this to include a policy on cyber-bullying.

"Cyber-bullying is something people who would never bully someone face to face are getting involved with. We are seeing a whole new group of [young people](#), enabled by electronic devices, taking part in bullying."

More information: Chris Kyriacou et al. Cyberbullying bystanders and moral engagement: a psychosocial analysis for pastoral care, *Pastoral Care in Education* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2018.1453857](https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2018.1453857)

Provided by University of York

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