AN EXAMINATION OF ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF CYBERBULLYING IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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by

Chelsea Brown

Submitted   **Approved**

DATE: March 22, 2011   DATE: _____

_____   _____

Student's Signature   Mentor's Signature

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to conduct an investigation of the administrators' and teachers' perception of cyberbullying in Suffolk County middle schools. In addition, it will look at the effectiveness of the interventions as reported by the administrators and teachers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Olweus (1993), an estimated 160,000 students skip school every day because they fear being attacked or intimated by other students. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry reports that as many as half of all adolescents are bullied at some time during their middle school years, and at least 10% are bullied on a regular basis (Harcey, 2007). President Obama is paving the way for victims and families of victims of cyberbullying to stand up and speak out. A conference at the White House was held March 10 to join students, parents, and schools from across the nation with the President of the United States, the Department of Education and the Department of Health to work together and take action to address cyberbullying and how to promote a shared sense of digital citizenship (Lee, 2011). School districts are responsible for providing a safe learning environment for students. Currently with the technology of the 21st Century and the consuming use of the internet, there exists a ubiquitous nature of social networking; when used responsibly, these sites can have great value in connecting people and ideas. Cyberbullying takes on many forms including text messaging, instant messaging, e-mails, and blogs. Today's adolescents (ages 11-14), often have difficulty responsibly managing the content of their pages. In fact, some of the exchanges that kids are having among and between each other are extremely toxic, and are profoundly affecting how

they are learning during their school day. Before children can learn, grow and be challenged, they need to feel safe, emotionally and physically.   Students will learn best when they are in a learning environment free from the unnecessary social and emotional distractions.

BACKGROUND

Twenty-first century administrators are faced with the daunting task of providing a learning environment that is safe for all students and staff. Middle schools students naturally will want to connect with their peers in and out of school. For many years, these connections could only happen in person or locally. With the emergence of the social networking site MySpace in 2003 and over 200 sites by 2006, traditional methods of bullying have transformed and morphed into cyberspace. According to researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2006), their study of nearly 1,500 Internet-using adolescents, over one-third of youth reported being victimized online and over 16% of respondents admitted to cyber bullying others. See Figures 1-1, 1-2.

Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (2010)

Lifetime Cyberbullying Victimization Rates
Seven Different Studies 2004-2010

date	Feb 2010	Nov 2009	June 2009	June 2009	May 2007	Jan 2005	June 2004
#schools	37	1	7	8	30	n.a.	n.a.
sample size	4441	356	700	930	1800	3840	370
method	Classroom/Elec	Classroom/Elec	Classroom/Elec	Classroom/Elec	Classroom/Paper	Online	Online

Percent values: 20.8, 28.7, 24.2, 21.5, 18.8, 36.7, 40.6

Cyberbullying Reseach Center
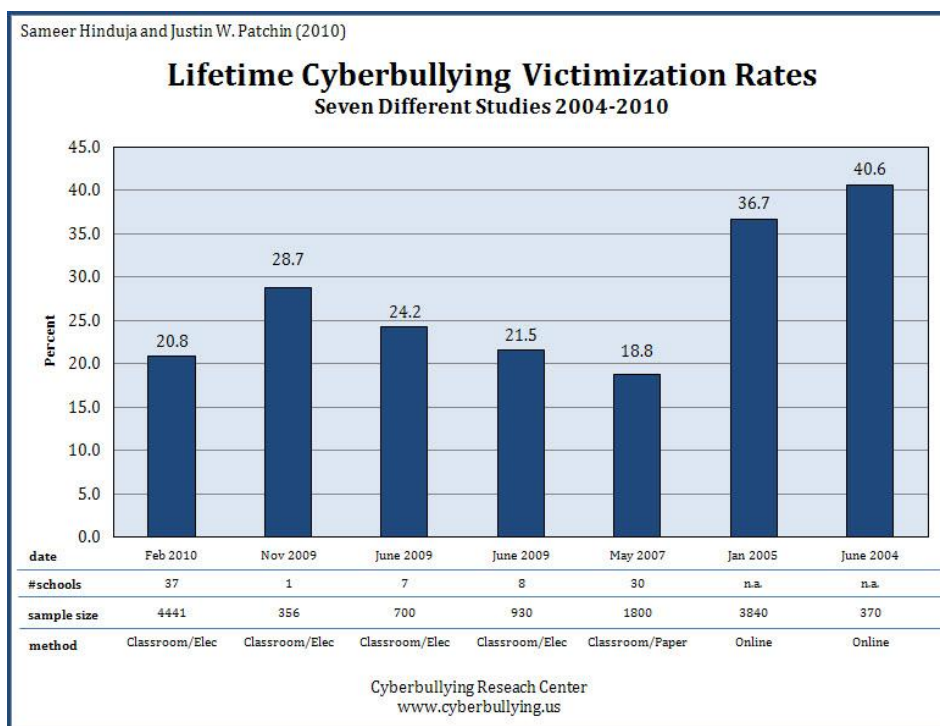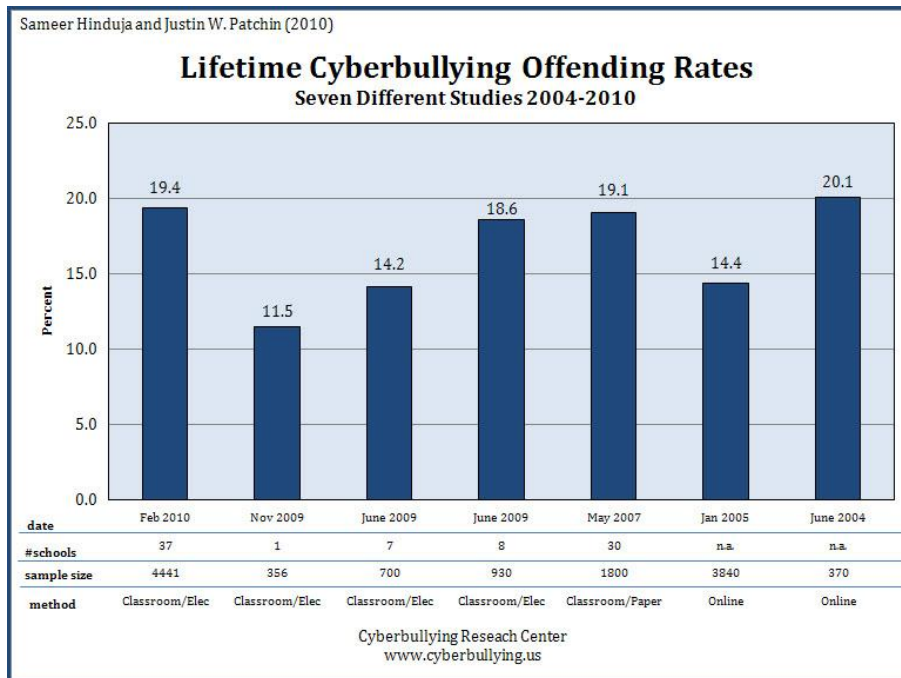www.cyberbullying.us

Figure 1-1

Figure 1-2

Protecting and educating today's adolescents is a task that has become insurmountable in the time that it consumes to address the social and emotional well being of the victims and authors of cyber bullying (Derrick, 2008). Administrators are finding it difficult to juggle the necessary tasks and responsibilities that are part of their job description in addition to the needs of the building where it relates to instructional leadership.

In the past five years there has been an increase in the coverage and publicity surrounding the fatal consequences of cyberbullying. In 2006, a 13 year old female committed suicide after experiencing cyberbullying from former friends and one mother through a fake MySpace account. In 2010 the news coverage surrounded two more suicides as a result of cyberbullying. One was a college student from Rutgers University and the other, a fifteen year old high school student (Davis, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education is examining the issue of bullying. It held its first bullying "summit" in August 2010 and sent letters to school leaders urging them to

take action. There is increasing pressure on schools to do something about this wave of cyberbullying being reported in the media (Davis, 2011).

Social network sites are here to stay and will likely develop in ways we have not yet conceived, but middle-level students need help in teaching them how to use this exciting technology responsibly. As with many new technologies, these sites need to be approached as a learning tool and students need to be educated on their proper use. While administrators, counselors, and faculty, are working with students who are either victims or authors of toxic electronic exchanges, this is not enough. Schools need to be open to the benefits of social networking sites and explore the numerous opportunities they provide for new learning and simultaneously guide and protect their students from misuse and the potential victimization of cyberbullying (Derrick, 2008).

DEFINITIONS

Bullying: When one is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1993)

Cyberbullying: Sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the internet or other digital communication devices (Willard, 2006)

Negative Actions: When someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another, aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1993)

Direct Bullying: Relatively open attacks on a victim (Olweus, 1993)

Indirect Bullying: Social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group (Olweus, 1993)

Flaming: Sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group (Willard, 2006)

Masquerade: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger (Willard, 2006)

Outing/Trickery: Sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images. Engage in tricks to solicit embarrassing information that is then made public (Willard, 2006).

Exclusion: Actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group, such as exclusion from an Instant Messaging (IM) "buddies" list (Willard, 2006)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

      The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How is cyberbullying distinct from physical bullying?

2. How prevalent and pervasive (according to survey responses) is cyber bullying for middle school students in Suffolk County?

3. What interventions are utilized by the administrators and teachers when reports are submitted?

4. What interventions are reported as being most effective by administrators and teachers?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

      The result of this study is intended to provide useful information about cyberbullying with respect to the administrators' and teachers' perception. The data collected will tell a valuable story, one which will enable school districts to better attend to the problem lurking beyond the walls of the classroom. Bullying is no longer the traditional "face-to-face" interactions, but rather it has leapt into the digital world. Schools, parents, and guardians need to keep up with the pace. The data may serve to produce current material for school building

leaders to effectively tackle this rapidly-growing phenomenon by enabling them to create,

modify and implement better procedures and policies that address cyberbullying and the misuse

and abuse of social network sites.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of literature and data that will guide the researcher's understanding of bullying and cyberbullying in schools, interventions, and legal cases.

BULLYING/CYBERBULLYING IN SCHOOLS

In education, words and terms evolve, disappear, are replaced and then resurface as research is gathered to keep current with the ever-changing trends. However, bullying is a term that is consistently used and has been present in the media. Professor, author and researcher, Dan Olweus is largely responsible for the research done on student-to student bullying. He reports that bullying dates back to the late 1960's and early 1970's (1993). It wasn't until 1982, when a newspaper reported that three 10 to 14 year old boys from the northern part of Norway committed suicide that the media and public began to have a heightened interest. The end result of this awareness was a nationwide campaign against bullying launched by the Ministry of Education in the fall of 1983 (Olweus, 1993). Bullying has continued to gain attention in the United States over the past three decades. In a report by the US Secret Service, looking at the characteristics of 37 school shooting and the students involved, two-thirds of the attackers were victims of bullying prior to the incidents (Dake, Price, Telljohann, 2003).

Similarly, in the United States has found that more and more attention is being paid to this rapidly growing phenomenon. In 2005, the "Stop Bullying Now!" campaign was launched in an attempt to address these vicious acts that are interfering with schools across the nation (Ascione, 2006). Now, six years later, President Obama held a conference in March 2010 to attack the same issue that is still prevalent in schools across the nation. This nationwide effort is

in response to increasing media coverage of adolescent suicides related to the effects of bullying. However, this bullying has taken on a new image and new location. No longer is it the common "face-to-face" bullying happening as students are walking to and from school or on the back of the school bus, but rather it has launched into cyberspace and the digital world through sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Formspring.

PREVENTION MEASURES

Prevention of school bullying is essential in any school system. Schools must take responsibility for protecting the well-being of their students so they can learn and achieve success. Researchers have found that prevention must involve peers due in part to the fact that bullying goes beyond the bully and victim. Students take on other participant roles such as assistants of the bully, reinforce of the bully, defenders of the victim, and outsiders (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003). Because bullying involves a group process, the prevention should involve a group process as well.

Olweus' "Bullying Prevention Program" is the most well known prevention program, from which other programs build from and modify. His program, evaluated from 1983 to 1985 consisted of 2,500 students ranging in age from 11 to 14 in 42 schools in Bergen, Norway. His longitudinal study confirmed a 50% reduction in bullying incidents as well as a reduction in the number of students being victimized (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003). His program consists of two general conditions for school-based intervention programs: (1) That adults at school, and to some degree, at home become aware of the extent of bully/victim problems in "their" school; (2) That adults decide to engage themselves, with some degree of seriousness, in changing the situation (Olweus, 1993).

Conceptual Rationale

   This study will examine how administrators and teachers in middle perceive

cyberbullying. This study will build on the work previously completed by Harcey as discussed

earlier. While his study examined the administrator and student perceptions, this study will look

to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the prevalence and impact of

cyberbullying in middle schools in Suffolk County. The conceptual framework developed for

this research is a combination of four sources: Olweus (1994), Li (2005), Willard (2006), and

Haag-Granello & Wheaton (2004). It is necessary to begin with Olweus' study on bulling in

schools to examine this growing phenomenon. Olweus, the pioneer of research on bullying, has

conducted numerous surveys in Scandinavia and with his research developed an outline how

bully/victim problems can be addressed and counteracted in schools (1993). Building on that

foundation, Li research took place in Canada involving 177 grade seven students and the extent

of their experiences with cyberbullying, bullying via electronic communication tools. Coupled

with Li, is the work done by Willard, Director for the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet

Use. Her work addresses the need to educate and mobilize educators, parents, students and

others to combat online social cruelty.

   The teacher and administrator surveys will be created using the preexisting works of

Olweus and administered online (via SurveyMonkey). Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate

the work done by Haag-Granello & Wheaton. They are responsible for outlining the benefits and

limitations to online data collection. In order to collect data using online surveys it is necessary

to document the work done by Haag-Granello & Wheaton (2006). Following their steps to

online data collection will hope to ensure the greatest results while retaining the integrity of the

data. There are many benefits to online data collection. As it becomes an increasing popular

tool for research one must appreciate its benefits: reduced response time, lower costs, ease of

data entry, flexibility of format, accessibility of participants, ability to obtain additional

response-set information, and advances in technology. In addition one must take into

consideration the limitations to this form of data collect: representativeness of the sample,

response rates, measurement errors, and technical difficulties (Haag-Granello & Wheaton, 2006).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to examine the administrator and teacher perception of cyberbullying in Suffolk County middle schools. In addition, the researcher examined the interventions being implemented and their effectiveness as reported by the administrators and teachers surveyed. The result of this study is intended to provide useful information about cyberbullying with respect to the administrators' and teachers' perception. The data collected will tell a valuable story, one which will enable school districts to better attend to the problem lurking beyond the walls of the classroom. The data may serve to produce current material for school building leaders to effectively tackle this rapidly-growing phenomenon by enabling them to create, modify and implement better procedures and policies that address cyberbullying and the misuse and abuse of social network sites.

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SETTING

       The schools that will be examined will be middle schools in Suffolk County. Data to describe these middle schools will be collected from The School District Almanac NYS Database, Data Points (Hughes, 2007).

SUBJECTS

       The subjects for this study will be building level administrators from middle schools located in Suffolk County on Long Island. These administrators will include, but are not limited to: principals, assistant principals, deans, department chairpersons, and directors. Subjects will also include teachers in middle schools in Suffolk County on Long Island. Teachers are defined as those staff providing instruction to students in grades 6-8.

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