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Bullying in Youth

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Abstract and Keywords

Bullying is the most common form of violence in schools and has been shown to disrupt the emotional and social development of both the targets and the perpetrators of bullying (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Bullying can be physical, verbal, relational, and direct or indirect. There are well-established age and sex trends (Olweus, 1993; Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). There has been considerable research on bullying-prevention programs and scholarship on best-practice guidelines for school social workers (Dupper, 2013). An emerging concern is with the use of electronic and Internet devices in bullying, referred to as “cyberbullying.” In this article we define bullying and cyberbullying; discuss risk factors associated with being a bully, a victim, and a bully-victim; describe prevention and intervention programs; and discuss emerging trends in both bullying and cyberbullying.

Keywords: bullying, cyberbullying, peer violence, peer aggression, perpetrator, school social work, victim

Definition

One of the first and most widely used definitions of bullying is when “a student ... is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1996, p. 265). There are three important components to this definition that have shaped scholarship around bullying. The first is the focus on *students*. Most research, legislation, and interventions address school-based student bullying where both the perpetrator and the target are students. In recent years, scholars have begun to use the “bullying” label to characterize interactions between groups other than students. These include bullying among siblings, between coworkers in the workplace, and between older adults (Brank et al., 2012). The common feature in these explorations of bullying is the repeated negative actions and systemic abuse of power (Rigby, 2002, cited in Dupper, 2013).

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The second component of Olweus's definition is the concept that, in order for behaviors to be considered "bullying," they have to be *repeated*. A single incident of violence by one student towards another would be considered school violence, but not bullying. This distinction has implications for how school policy, or legislation at the city or state level, may impact responses to youth violence.

The third component of the definition is *negative actions*. Disagreements over what constitutes a "negative action" have made it difficult for researchers to agree on what constitutes bullying. These differences have resulted in a body of scholarship on bullying whose findings can be hard to compare, and have made for inconsistent legislation and court cases.

In recent years, scholars have added to Olweus's definition, including the notion that the repeated negative actions are unprovoked (Dupper, 2013); that there is an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim based on physical size, strength, age, or social status (Brank et al., 2012); and that the victim is unable to avoid or stop the victimization (Butler et al., 2009). While the added specificity makes it easier for policymakers and researchers to operationalize and measure bullying, cyberbullying researchers have noted that it can be challenging to define what constitutes an imbalance of power when a perpetrator is anonymous, or when a perpetrator would be considered less powerful offline (Slonje et al., 2013). School staff can find it difficult to establish which of two youths is the "more powerful." Researchers, students, and teachers appear to have different conceptions of what constitutes bullying (Brank et al., 2012). Students are more likely to exclusively identify direct bullying behaviors (for example, punching and teasing), than teachers or researchers. In contrast, teachers are more likely to include the possible effects of bullying, but not the issue of repetition, than either students or researchers. A final issue related to the definition of bullying is that it presents a dichotomy between bullies and victims, making it difficult for practitioners and scholars to identify and intervene with the group of youths with the poorest outcomes—those who are both bully and victim (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

Bullying as Distinct From School Violence

As mentioned above, bullying and school violence or peer victimization are not the same (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). For example, when a student rapes another student on school grounds, that rape constitutes school violence and peer victimization, but not bullying. While rape is an act of power, it does not have to be a repeated act and therefore does not qualify as bullying. Conversely, when a student is repeatedly rejected or ostracized, they are not considered to be the victim of school violence, but they would be considered to be the victim of bullying. There are instances when bullying, school violence, and peer victimization overlap, such as repeated physical assault on school grounds. Scholars also agree that bullying-prevention is important in reducing the acceptance of violence in general, and that addressing school violence can lead to a reduction in bullying (Craig &

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Pepler, 2007; Fonagy et al., 2009). For readers interested in social work and school violence, the reader is directed to the work of Ron Astor and colleagues (Benbenishty, Astor, & Estrada, 2008).

Types of Bullying

The types of bullying include physical bullying (for example, attacking a person or his or her belongings); verbal bullying (for example, teasing, taunting, or threatening); relational or indirect bullying (for example, social isolation, spreading rumors, or manipulating friendships); cyberbullying (that is, online bullying); sexual bullying (that is, any form of bullying based on person's sexuality or gender); and bias bullying (that is, based on membership in a marginalized group rather than individual characteristics) (Olweus, 1993; Dupper, 2013).

Prevalence and Incidence of Bullying

Scholars and practitioners recognize three categories of bullying: (1) victim or target; (2) bully or perpetrator; and (3) victim-perpetrator. Although journalists and bloggers focus mostly on the victims or targets of bullying, researchers have shown that there are negative outcomes for the bully as well. As noted above, different researchers have used different definitions of bullying, making it difficult to compare across studies to determine rates of bullying. For example, research has reported rates of victimization that range from 10% to 90% (Brank et al., 2012). A highly publicized study of 43,000 students in the United States (Josephson Institute, 2010) found that in the past year, 50% of youth reported having bullied someone, and 47% reported having been bullied. But the survey asked about "bullying, teasing, and taunting" in the same question, making it difficult to know what percentage of youth were involved in actual bullying. A more rigorous approach to identifying youth involved in bullying was described by Solberg and Olweus (2003). Using the established Olweus definition, Solberg and Olweus (2003) correlated reports of bullying behavior with internalized problems (for example, anxiety and depression), and externalized problems (for example, hyperactivity and conduct) and determined that being the perpetrators or targets of bullying "two or three times a month" was an optimal cutoff for determining which students could be considered a bully (perpetrator) or a victim (target).

Bullying Involvement

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Researchers have identified a number of factors that contribute to bullying involvement, including cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social status, family environment, socioeconomic status, and so forth. Some factors are the same for bullies, victims, and bully-victims. An important limitation of the research discussed below is that most studies are cross-sectional and cannot establish which came first—the risk factor or the bullying involvement. For example, bullies are more likely to have high social status. However, it is unclear from the research if a student's high social status preceded the bullying behavior, or if it was, in part, a result of the bullying behavior. The implications for these differences are not just academic. If we were to establish that social status increases following bullying behavior, then the logical remedy is to engage in efforts to eliminate any bully-related gain in social status. If, on the other hand, the student was able to engage in the bullying behavior because he or she already had high social status and his or her social status did not change as a result of the bullying behavior, then interventions to address perceived gains in bully-related social status would be ineffective in reducing bullying involvement.

Bully-Related Factors

A number of the factors that researchers have identified as contributing to bullying are framed as psychosocial and family environment deficits. Children are more likely to engage in bullying if they have poor impulse control, lack empathy, have lower IQs, have poor verbal communication skills, demonstrate less empathy, have poor emotional regulation, are less honest, have parents who have been in jail or had confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect, have low rates of parental monitoring, and have a belief that society is tolerant of antisocial behavior (Bollmer et al., 2005; Farrington & Baldry, 2010; Garner & Hinton, 2010; Marini et al., 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1999). Recently, researchers have identified factors that are generally considered desirable factors, but that also appear to correlate with bullying: children who are high in leadership skills and who have larger social circles are also more likely to engage in bullying (Perren & Alsaker, 2006).

Victim-Related Factors

Factors that seem to contribute to the likelihood of being bullied include deficits in understanding social norms, expressing sadness, and being socially anxious, submissive, and withdrawn. Children who report having fewer friends, report internalizing rather than externalizing behaviors, or who report low parental or family support are more likely to report being victimized (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010; Schreier, Wolke, & Thomas, 2009).

Bully-Victim-Related Factors

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These youth who are both bullies and victims are the most at risk for psychosocial problems, including suicide. It appears that youth who have the weakest bond with school, display the most behavior problems, have the highest number of deviant friends, and display the greatest amount of deviance are the most likely to be both the perpetrators and victims of bullying (Brank et al., 2012). Although research has found that males are more likely than females to be bully-victims, and that they are a relatively small subset of youth involved in bullying, one study found that in an online environment (cyberbullying), females are more likely to be bully-victims, and more youth (25.7%) are both victim and perpetrator (bully-victim) than are either bully (8.0%) or victim (23.8%) (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012).

Bullying and Suicide

The most terrible and well-publicized consequence of bullying is suicide (Bazelon, 2013). There are many examples in the media of journalists making a causal link between bullying (either traditional or cyberbullying) and suicide. While journalists can be forgiven for sacrificing nuance in order to write accessible and concise reports in a matter of hours, the popular focus on bullying as proximal causal mechanism behind suicide is not supported by the research (Cooper, Clements, & Holt, 2012). Existing research is limited in that many studies do not control for known psychiatric contributing factors such as depression (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2008; Roeger, Allinson, Korossy-Horwood, Eckert, & Goldney, 2010); report only on suicidal ideation or attempts, but not deaths; or establish correlation but cannot establish causality (for example, that bullying preceded suicidal ideation) (Kaminski & Fang, 2009). While youths' suicidal ideation, attempts, and deaths are not caused by involvement in bullying, the most rigorous research has found an independent contribution of bullying involvement and increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors among pre-adolescent victims, perpetrators, and victim-perpetrators (Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini, & Wolke, 2012). Youths who are the victims cyberbullying have been found to be at increased risk for suicidal ideation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Although some have reported that the longer one is a bully or is victimized, the greater the likelihood of suicide (Cooper, Clements, & Holt, 2012), the only nationally representative, population-based longitudinal study of youth bullying in the United States found that the relationship between bullying and suicide largely disappears over time (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Copeland and colleagues (2013) compared suicide risk among young adults who reported bullying involvement in their youth with suicide risk among young adults who reported no bullying involvement in their youth. They found that, after controlling for childhood psychiatric disorders and family hardship, there was no difference in suicide risk in young adults who, as youths, were victims or perpetrators of bullying in their youth compared to youths who were not. The only group that reported a significant increase in suicidal thoughts and behaviors was males (but not females) who were both perpetrators and victims of bullying.

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So, while bullying involvement increases the risk for suicidal behaviors, current research does not support a proximal causal link between bullying and suicide in youth. Because social workers provide more mental health services than all other mental health professionals combined, it is particularly important that social workers identify and address factual inaccuracies in reports on bullying, such as the 2011 documentary *Bully*, which presented bully victimization as the sole cause of a teenage boy's death by suicide (Bazelon, 2012).

Interventions for Bullying

Interventions for bullying are predicated on the idea that children have the right to be protected from harm. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1998), “protection from abuse [is] an essential right for children, particularly when considering the negative effects of bullying upon both victims and perpetrators”. Most bullying interventions have targeted bullies and perpetrators, and their victims. Bullying is an international phenomenon, and bullying interventions have been developed in and evaluated in a number of countries around the world. The discussion that follows draws on this international research and highlights places where U.S.-specific differences or effects have been found in anti-bullying programs.

Anti-bullying interventions in schools have been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of both bullying and victimization (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). A 2010 systematic review and meta-analysis of 44 anti-bullying evaluations found that bullying decreased by 20% to 23%, and victimization decreased by 17% to 20% (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). Anti-bullying programs that were effective in reducing bullying and victimization included the following elements: parent training and meetings, playground supervision, programs of high intensity and long duration for both adults and children (that is, a greater “dose” of intervention), and the use of specific disciplinary methods. These elements have been previously identified in the social work literature as recommended practices (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). That said, as with most empirically supported interventions, existing studies establish correlation, not causation, between program elements and reductions in bullying and victimization.

There appears to be some controversy about which age group that benefits most from anti-bullying programs. Smith (2010) reviewed research that suggested that anti-bullying programs were more effective among younger children. He speculated that, for elementary-school children, it is more important to have the validation of “positive” peers, and there is greater involvement with and respect for teachers and other staff. During adolescence, however, the trend is to seek validation from rebellious or “negative” peers, and there is decreased influence by and involvement with teachers and other staff. In contrast, the systematic review and meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs by Ttofi and Farrington (2010) found that as students’ age increased, so did the effect of the anti-bullying program on reducing bullying and victimization. As noted in the beginning of this article, bullying increases significantly from elementary school to middle school. It is possible that the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs among older youth can be attributed to a methodological artifact: because the severity and prevalence of bullying is lower in elementary school, the effect size of the intervention will be lower. This does not mean that programs are less effective, it just highlights the magnitude of the problem as children enter adolescence.

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One common element in anti-bullying programs that was found to increase rather than decrease victimization was peer involvement (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). Ttofi and Farrington's review found that programs in which peers were formally engaged in mediation, mentoring, or bystander intervention demonstrated a significant increase in victimization ($B = -.236, p < .0001$). Therefore, although peer involvement has been recommended to social workers (Whitted & Drupper, 2005), Ttofi and Farrington recommended against including it in anti-bullying programs. They cited research from the juvenile justice literature that found that formal peer involvement with delinquent peers resulted in an increase in youth offending, rather than a decrease (Dodge et al., 2006, cited in Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

Anti-Bullying Programs in the United States

In the most recent and most comprehensive systematic review of anti-bullying programs, Ttofi and Farrington (2010) noted that effects were greater for anti-bullying programs in Norway, where the first and most widely researched anti-bullying program (Olweus's Bullying Prevention Program; Olweus, 1993) was developed. Evers, Van Marter, Prochaska, Johnson, & Prochaska (2007) suggested that the demands the Olweus model places on staff and administration are a barrier to implementing the model with fidelity in the United States (Evers, Van Marter, Prochaska, Johnson, & Prochaska, 2007). A number of anti-bullying programs have been developed and evaluated in the United States (Bryn, 2011; Evers, Van Marter, Prochaska, Johnson, & Prochaska, 2007; Fonagy et al., 2009; Jenson et al., 2010). While a comprehensive review of every program is beyond the scope of this article, a brief review of three different programs, rated as among the most effective in a systematic review (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010), which target youth at all levels of school, with traditional didactic instruction, computer-based intervention, and a combination of psychological assessment and whole-school intervention, will be illustrative, if not representative, of the types of bullying intervention programs that are currently being evaluated in the United States. For a systematic review of school-based bullying prevention programs, see Ttofi and Farrington (2010). For reviews on the components of successful bullying prevention programs, see Mishna (2009) and Dupper (2013).

Youth Matters

The Youth Matters program is a two-year curriculum that targets youth in grades 4 and 5 who are at risk for bullying. It uses a series of four didactic modules that teach specific skills (for example, social competency and social resistance), and issues (for example, defining bullying, empathy, safe environments, and so on) in order to "promote the healthy development of young people by encouraging positive relationships between students and school adults and promoting safe and healthy norms throughout the school

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community” (Jenson et al., 2010, p. 510). Jenson and colleagues (2010) reported that this program showed significant reduction in victimization, but not in bullying behaviors.

SPC-CAPSLE

School Psychiatric Consultation (SPC) and Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment (CAPSLE) are two manualized interventions that were evaluated against a treatment-as-usual (TAU) condition as a three-year anti-bullying program with children in kindergarten through fifth grade (Fonagy et al., 2009). Schools that implemented the SPC condition provided individual intervention for youth. Schools that implemented the CAPSLE condition received a combination of school-wide teacher training and youth instruction. According to Fonagy et al., (2009):

In Year 1, teachers received a day of group training, students received nine sessions of self-defense training, and the CAPSLE team consulted with school staff monthly. Year 2 began with a school-wide half-day refresher training for all school staff and a three-session refresher self-defense course, and consultation continued with counselors, teachers, and the adult/peer mentor programs. (p. 610)

Although the evaluation was three years, there was minimal intervention in Year 3, based on the researcher’s contention that after two years, the principles of SPC-CAPSLE would have been integrated into the school ethos. This evaluation demonstrated the most significant decreases in bullying behavior and victimization in schools that offered the CAPSLE condition (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). The authors concluded that CAPSLE, a teacher-implemented school-wide intervention that does not focus on disturbed children, substantially reduced aggression and improved classroom behavior (Fonagy et al., 2009). CAPSLE has been accepted for review by the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

The Build Respect, Stop Bullying™ Program

This program is based on the “transtheoretical model,” which identifies which of five stages of change someone is in and includes recommendations for how to best intervene to change behaviors. The program targets students in middle and high school. The youth intervention is three half-hour computer sessions wherein students engage with an interactive computer multimedia computer program (either web-based or on CD-ROM). The computer program evaluates their stage of change with regard to bullying behavior or their risk for victimization. Parents and school staff receive a 10-page booklet that addresses the computer intervention, basic concepts about bullying, and (for school staff) information on classroom activities and how to work with parents. Teachers are not provided training and are responsible mainly for starting the program and assisting youth with the computer intervention. Evers and colleagues (2007) reported that there was a

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significant reduction in the percentage of students in middle schools and high schools who participated in bullying.

Cyberbullying

There is some debate whether cyberbullying is a form of traditional bullying or is a distinct phenomenon (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013). We are discussing cyberbullying separately from traditional bullying, not because the debate has been settled, but because the recency of the phenomena justifies a separate literature review and discussion. It is likely that this debate will be settled in the coming years.

Cyberbullying has been defined as the repeated use of the Internet or other digital communication devices to intentionally harm others (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008; Willard, 2007). This can include such behaviors as online fighting, harassment, stalking, impersonation, "outing," trickery, exclusion, and more, via the Internet, personal websites, email, blogs, instant messaging (IM), cell phones, and chat rooms (Willard, 2007). Cyberbullying has also been referred to as "online bullying" (Nansel et al., 2001), "online harassment" (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007), and "electronic bullying" (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Some researchers have renamed traditional bullying "offline bullying" (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013), in order to distinguish between bullying that occurs online and offline (that is, traditional bullying). Because the debate is far from settled, we will use the term "traditional bullying."

Traditional Bullying Versus Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is similar to and yet distinct from traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). An overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying victimization has been noted: those who are bullied in the traditional sense are often those who are victims of cyberbullying. One report indicated that 36% of children are simultaneously bullied and cyberbullied (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007), while another study indicated that this overlap extended to 85% of children in its study sample (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Other researchers have also noted the strong relationship that exists between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Didden et al., 2009; Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). The emotional and psychological impact of cyberbullying appears to be similar to that of traditional bullying. Victims of both forms of bullying have reported negative physical, social, and psychological problems, such as extreme stress, upset, fear (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000), and depressive symptomology (Ybarra, 2004). And perpetrators of cyberbullying also appear to have similar negative outcomes (Mason, 2008). Perpetrators and victims of both types of bullying are at increased risk for suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

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In contrast to traditional bullying, cyberbullying is almost entirely *relational*, in that the method used to repeatedly cause harm is words, sounds, and images, rather than the physical violence that is found in some forms of traditional bullying. The definition of a traditional bully is one who repeatedly engages in behaviors that are intended to harm another, usually one with less power. The concept of repetition is less straightforward in cyberbullying (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013). For example, while there is clearly repetition in one person's being responsible for 1000 hateful posts, if one person posts a single hateful comment, but that comment is reposted by 1000 people, is that cyberbullying? Cyberbullying occurs in venues that are different than those found in traditional bullying. While traditional bullying has primarily been researched and addressed on school property, cyberbullying is more likely to occur outside of school property. Cyberbullying can be anonymous, can occur around the clock, is not limited by geography, can involve potentially millions of people, and is not well monitored by parents, which creates an environment where victims of cyberbullying are more accessible (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Another way that cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying is in the role of the bystander[s] (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013). For example, a bystander might be in the same physical space but not the same cyberspace as a cyberbully. In traditional bullying, the perpetrator gains or reinforces social status by bullying in front of others. Cyberbullying (for example, harassing text messages) can occur without an audience, so the social status function of the bystander is eliminated. In contrast, the potential audience for cyberbullying is significantly larger than in traditional bullying. It is not uncommon for teenagers to have 1000 "friends" on Facebook who may be considered bystanders or witnesses to a series of abusive posts. Another difference is that, whereas in traditional bullying the victim can usually establish a safe haven, there is no safe haven in cyberspace.

Prevalence and Demographic Factors—The Overlapping Role of Age, Gender, Grade, and Race

Evidence suggests that a substantial number of youth are victims of cyberbullying. A meta-synthesis on cyberbullying studies conducted by Tokunaga (2010) indicated that, on average, approximately 20% to 40% of youths report being victims of cyberbullying, with the greatest frequency of victimization occurring in seventh and eighth grades. Another recent study found that close to 30% of a middle-school sample reported being victims of one or more forms of cyberbullying within the past 30 days of the study (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010A). The phenomenon of the bully-victim appears to occur in cyberbullying. Ten percent of a sample of 4400 youth said they had the status of both cyberbullying victim and offender (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Youth reports suggest that the incidence of cyberbullying increases significantly as youths enter middle school, but that it levels off as they enter high school (Smith et al., 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Worthen, 2007). These youth reports have been corroborated by school social workers who reported that cyberbullying was significantly more pervasive in middle and high school

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than in elementary school (Slovak & Singer, 2011). As the age of youths who use technology decreases, it is possible that cyberbullying among young children might increase. Two surveys conducted in 2011 found that 83% of children in grades four through twelve have Internet access in the privacy of their bedrooms (Children Online, 2011); the percentage of younger teens with smartphones is increasing without a comparable increase in the number of parents who report monitoring or controlling what their child can access with their phone (Lenhart et al., 2011).

Along with trends in age, gender trends have also been observed in the recent history of cyberbullying. Results of a recent study indicate that compared to males, females are more likely to be involved as both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying acts (Snell & Englander, 2010). This differs from traditional bullying, where boys are more likely to be involved (Smith et al., 2008). Also, with regard to current and cumulative experiences, girls experience both more current and cumulative experiences with cyberbullying. Evidence of this is illustrated by one study documenting that more girls between the ages of 10 and 18 years reported cyberbullying with in the last 30 days compared to males (7.9% vs. 7.0%), and they also reported more lifetime experiences with it (25.1% versus 16.6%) (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010B). While more research is needed to extrapolate gender differences in cyberbullying, preliminary studies indicate that girls are more likely to be involved in this type of emotional bullying.

With regard to race and cyberbullying, it appears that all are equally likely to be victims and perpetrators, and most research does not find much of a difference between races (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). While all are races are perceived as vulnerable, one study found that White students are more likely to report bullying over their lifetime as both the victims and offenders, compared to other races in the study (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

Schools, Cyberbullying, and Intervention

Since cyberbullying primarily occurs off school property, schools face special challenges when trying to address the ramifications of the phenomenon inside of school (Conn, 2010). This often leaves schools administrators confused about their legal responsibilities when addressing cyberbullying that occurs off school property (Blair, 2003). Additionally, parents are experiencing a “digital divide” with their children that can leave them feeling unable to monitor or assist their children online, leaving cyberspace with a general lack of adult supervision (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, & Falconer, 2011; Tapscott, 1999). This legal confusion and lack of monitoring may make it appear to youths that nothing will be done if they report cyberbullying. There is some evidence to suggest this concern is valid: a 2011 study found that nearly half of school social workers believed they were not equipped to deal with cyberbullying (Slovak & Singer, 2011). Other studies have reported that fewer than 9% of cyber victims reported their online bullying experience to an adult (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). But, like traditional bullying, cyberbullying is something that the courts and the public hold staff accountable for addressing. States have begun to look at legal precedent to include

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cyberbullying in their school bullying policies (Mason, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012)., There is a belief that creating clear and effective school policy on the issue of cyberbullying similar to that concerning traditional bullying can reduce victimization and help the perpetrators (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

Along with policies, schools can also implement programming that can address cyberbullying within a general framework for traditional bullying prevention. There have been systematic reviews of program and approaches that suggest a systemic and whole-school approach manages the different types of bullying behaviors (Pearce et al., 2011). Research indicates that school-wide prevention programs will have the greatest impact (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011) and also can be utilized to change school climate. School climate is important in creating a positive and safe atmosphere, and research has demonstrated that students are less likely to report experiencing bullying at school if they perceive a positive school climate (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

While school programming for traditional bullying and cyberbullying may overlap, the unique nature and environment of cyberbullying require additional measures in prevention. For example, interventions can include technology that blocks access to certain websites or computer technology, or that establishes minimum privacy settings both in the home and in the schools (Tokunaga, 2010). Additionally, while the schools can have policies and procedures, school social workers can also take the lead in educating students, staff, parents, and the community on cyberbullying (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). Surprisingly, there has been no research into school social workers' knowledge of, or responses, to cyberbullying. But, while the schools play an important role in prevention of cyberbullying, the home environment is key in prevention efforts, since this is where most cyberbullying will occur. Mason (2008) pointed out that parental monitoring of youth technology can cut the probability of being a victim of cyberbullying by as much as 50%. Parents can be coached to provide meaningful structure for their children with regard to uses of technology and online socialization and join with them in this medium in meaningful ways (Hannah, 2010). Slonje, Smith, and Frisé (2013) have noted that, because most cyberbullying occurs outside of school, efforts to reduce cyberbullying must include advocacy and research by social workers and other social scientists who work with youth outside of school settings. This opens the door to social work involvement to reduce bullying and victimization without having to be based in the schools.

Implications and Conclusion

In its most basic form, “bullying” is the repeated and intentional abuse of one person by another. In practice, bullying is rarely basic or obvious (Bazelon, 2013). An act of bullying is an individual decision, made for social advancement within a group, informed by family and community values, which is facilitated by or inhibited by school culture. Variations in any of these systems complicate the task of addressing bullying. Imagine a scenario wherein one girl is reported for repeatedly and intentionally threatening to harm another girl. On the surface, this appears to fit the definition of bullying. If, however, the alleged perpetrator reports that she is simply responding to threats made by the alleged victim (but cannot provide proof), and the family supports the girl for “standing up for herself,” then the social worker has to decide whether the behavior constitutes bullying, school violence, or simply “drama” (Bazelon, 2013).

The literature reviewed earlier in the article suggests that social workers need to intervene differently with bullying than with a single incident of school violence or with what might be considered normal peer conflict. In the above scenario, if the alleged perpetrator is a popular girl with high social standing and is, in fact, engaging in systematic abuse of someone of a lower social standing, then the research has found that engaging these two girls in mediation, peer-based support groups, or just letting them “work it out” will probably make the bullying worse (Dupper, 2013; Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

In fact, the social worker cannot think of intervention solely at the individual or dyadic level. Because bullying is a complex, multi-systemic problem, social workers need to think about identification and intervention from a multi-systemic or “whole-school” perspective (Dupper, 2013). Social workers can begin to identify signs of bully involvement through individual characteristics: what is the youth’s social status, and social or physical confidence? Is the youth engaging in school-refusal behavior (Kearney, 2004); is he or she afraid to enter the school bathroom? Are the parents involved? Social workers can look at the family and community: is there a value placed on establishing oneself in a “one-up” position, or is there a value placed on mutuality, communalism, and equality? Social workers can also look at the school’s culture: do teachers, administrators, and other staff model safety, respect, and appropriate discipline, or do they model social dominance by using their power to punish, humiliate, or unreasonably discipline students? Are students encouraged to make bullying “uncool,” or are they left on their own to decide how to respond to bullying behavior? Are students monitored, or are they expected to monitor themselves? Bullying is inherently relational: without a victim there is no bully; without an approving audience, bullies have less reason to victimize. The research has suggested that when empirically supported whole-school anti-bullying programs are implemented without whole-school buy-in, the programs are not likely to be effective (Ttofi &

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Farrington, 2010). Social workers have a responsibility to advocate for anti-bullying programs to be implemented wholly and with fidelity.

Emerging Trends in Bullying

Dupper (2013) identified three emerging areas of attention in bullying research. The first is *teacher-student bullying*. Dupper noted that this nascent area of research has focused primarily on religiously motivated bullying: for example, teachers who repeatedly shame and humiliate students because of the student's religious (for example, pagan or Muslim) or non-religious (for example, atheist or agnostic) beliefs. A second area of research is the use of *shelter dogs* to combat bullying. These programs build on youths' affinity for dogs to teach them "empathy, respect for others, compassion, social skills, responsibility, and self-control" (Dupper, 2013, p. 88). A third area is the development of *anti-bullying legislation*. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2013), 49 states and the District of Columbia have anti-bullying laws that require school policies to be instituted. An emerging trend in legislation is its expansion to include bullying by electronic means: 47 states address electronic harassment, and 16 states have laws that specifically address cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Other trends include identifying specific groups as more likely to be victims of bullying (for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer / questioning students; students with disabilities), instituting mandatory professional development for school staff, and developing protections for youths who report bullying activities (Dupper, 2013).

In conclusion, this review of bullying has reviewed the most up-to-date research on what factors contribute to bully involvement (as victim, bully, and bully-victim); the long-term effects of bullying involvement; components of successful anti-bullying programs; and an in-depth look at the difference between bullying offline (traditional bullying) and online (cyberbullying). The importance of social workers in addressing all forms of bullying cannot be overstated. Because social workers are employed as frontline workers in schools, as researchers, and as policymakers, they have the potential to wield enormous influence over both policy and practice.

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Further Readings

Cyberbullying and Cyber Social Work. Dr. Janet Joiner discusses her work with cyberbullying behavior and addresses how modern technology can be integrated safely and productively into social work practice and education. <http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/podcast/episode.asp?ep=116>

StopBullying.gov. Provides free information from all government agencies involved in bullying-prevention. Includes resources for students, educators, parents, and researchers.

Anti-Defamation League. The Anti-Defamation League has developed curricula for students, educators, and parents to address bullying and cyberbullying, as well as a model cyberbullying prevention law: <http://www.adl.org/combatbullying/>.

Cyberbullying Research Center. The Cyberbullying Research Center is a clearinghouse for original research by Drs. Justin Patchin and Samir Hinduja about cyberbullying. They have materials for scholars as well as students and parents: www.cyberbullying.us.

It Gets Better Project. Started by Dan Savage and his husband Terry as an invitation to create and post videos to YouTube.com that explain to LGBTQ youth that they are not alone, that there are people who will accept them, and that it will get better. The project specifically addresses issues of bullying and suicide: www.itgetsbetter.org.

The Trevor Project. Provides around-the-clock phone and online crisis intervention and suicide prevention to LGBTQ youth. <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Stop Bullying: Speak Up. Facebook's campaign against bullying: www.facebook.com/stopbullyingspeakup.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Provides education about suicide prevention, and funds research into suicide prevention programs, including those that look at the intersection between bullying and suicide: www.afsp.org.

Whole-School Bullying Prevention Programs

Bullyproofing Your School. This program reduces bullying by empowering students (a "caring majority") to take the lead in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring community. The program is run through the National Center for School Engagement: www.schoolengagement.org.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Although this program was founded in Norway, it is the most widely used and evaluated bullying prevention program in the world, and the only bullying prevention program included in the United States' Blueprints for Violence

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Prevention. The program addresses bullying at the individual, classroom, and school campus levels: www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/index.page.

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