

Beyond the Numbers: Exploring More Completely the Cyberbullying Experiences of Adolescents

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Abstract

The current project seeks to evaluate qualitative responses to questions about the nature of cyberbullying experiences among a national sample of 5,500 middle and high school students. Consistent with thematic analysis, researchers reviewed responses to several open-ended questions about cyberbullying victimization and perpetration, created a rubric, and categorized the respondent's experience based on the rubric. Preliminary results show wide variation in experiences with cyberbullying, with some students significantly impacted and others not so much. Implications for intervention will also be discussed.

Figure 1

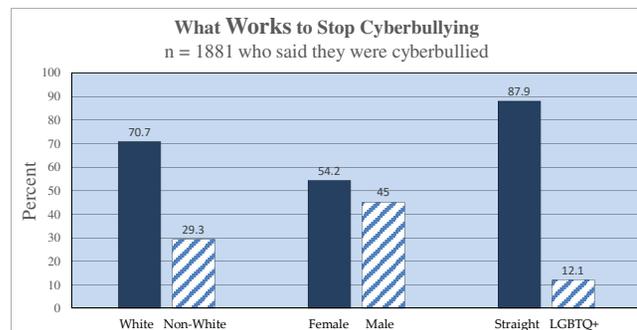


Figure 1. Demographic information on the Race, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation of respondents who said they were cyberbullied in their lifetime.

Results

33.6% of respondents indicated they had been a victim of cyberbullying in their lifetime.

Analysis of the frequency statistics of the coded responses to the question "What worked?" indicated that several interventions worked to stop cyberbullying to varying degrees. The most common response was Blocking the cyberbully, which 25.2% of participants indicated had worked for them. The second most common response was to Ignore it at 16.9%, followed by Telling a parent at 11.8%. The top eight most common responses are shown in Figure 2.

"Based on my experience, the best action was to simply block that person and delete all traces of the bullying." – a respondent who has been cyberbullied in their lifetime.

We would like to thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire for their support of this research.

Methods

A survey was distributed to collect the data. A national sample of 5,593 students responded to open-ended questions about cyberbullying. Participants were middle and high school students between the ages of 12-17 ($M = 14.49$, $SD = 1.67$). 49.9% of the sample self-identified as female ($N = 2792$); 49.7% identified as male ($N = 2777$). 66% of participants were White ($N = 3691$), 12% Black or African-American ($N = 673$), 11.9% Hispanic ($N = 667$), 3.6% Asian ($N = 199$), and 6.4% identified as another race. 92.8% of the sample was heterosexual ($N = 5189$) while 7.2% was non-heterosexual ($N = 65$ Gay or Lesbian, 157 Bisexual, 129 Questioning, and 53 Other).

For the purposes of this research, participants who never experienced cyberbullying in their lifetime were excluded. This left a sample of 1881 students aged 12-17 ($M = 14.64$, $SD = 1.65$). For the specific demographic information of this sample, see Figure 1. 463 of these participants did not provide a usable answer to the question "What worked?" and were removed from the analysis, leaving a final sample of 1418 students.

Participants responded to the question "What worked?" in their experience in regards to cyberbullying. Their answers were coded by two undergraduate research assistants based on predetermined possible responses such as blocking the cyberbully, reporting it to the school, calling the police, and so on. Four responses (revenge, talking to the cyberbully about it, resolving the situation with bully, and nothing) did not meet the $\kappa > .600$ criteria for interrater reliability and were excluded from the final analyses. The remaining responses ranged in interrater reliability from $\kappa = .688$ to $\kappa = .982$.

Figure 2

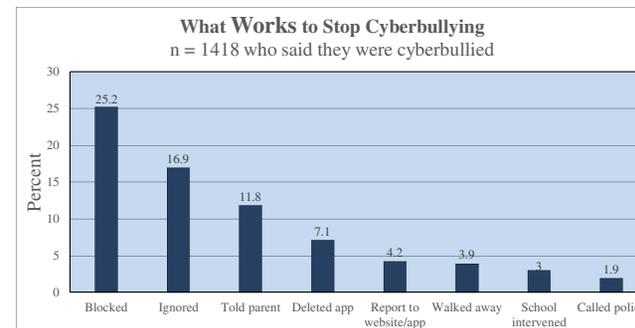


Figure 2. The eight most common responses to "What worked?" to stop cyberbullying as reported by respondents who said they were cyberbullied in their lifetime.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the most effective way to stop cyberbullying as reported by cyberbullying victims ages 12-17 is to block the cyberbully, followed by ignoring it, and getting a parent involved. This information should be passed on to the proper authorities so that victims can be advised on how to act when they are experiencing cyberbullying.

Future research should look into cases of cyberbullying where nothing worked to see if there may be specific populations that are being targeted in this way. Future researchers could also examine gender differences in the responses to evaluate if teens of different genders respond in different ways to cyberbullying.