***Cyberbullying rampant among high school students***

Science Blog May 5, 2013

Step into a class of 30 high school students and look around. Five of them have been victims of electronic bullying in the past year. “Electronic bullying of high school students threatens the self-esteem, emotional well-being and social standing of youth at a very vulnerable stage of their development,” said study author Andrew Adesman, MD, FAAP, chief of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Cohen Children’s Medical Center of New York. “Although teenagers generally embrace being connected to the Web and each other 24/7, we must recognize that these new technologies carry with them the potential to traumatize youth in new and different ways.”

 The researchers analyzed data from the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 15,425 public and private high school students. Results showed:

* One in six high school students (16.2 percent) reported being electronically bullied within the past 12 months.
* Girls were more than twice as likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying than boys (22.1 percent vs. 10.8 percent).
* Whites reported being the victim of cyberbullying more than twice as frequently as blacks.

“Electronic bullying is a very real yet silent danger that may be traumatizing children and teens without parental knowledge and has the potential to lead to devastating consequences,” said principal investigator Karen Ginsburg, also at Cohen Children’s Medical Center of New York.

 “As technology continues to advance and computers become that much more accessible, cyberbullying will continue to grow as a hurtful weapon against kids and teens,” Dr. Adesman concluded.

***CNN Special Report: Health “When Cyber-Bullying goes High-Tech”***

(CNN) -- Brandon Turley didn't have friends in sixth grade. He would often eat alone at lunch, having recently switched to his school without knowing anyone.

While browsing MySpace one day, he saw that someone from school had posted a bulletin -- a message visible to multiple people -- declaring that Turley was a "fag." Students he had never even spoken with wrote on it, too, saying they agreed.

Feeling confused and upset, Turley wrote in the comments, too, asking why his classmates would say that. The response was even worse: He was told on MySpace that a group of 12 kids wanted to beat him up, that he should stop going to school and die. On his walk from his locker to the school office to report what was happening, students yelled things like "fag" and "fatty."

"It was just crazy, and such a shock to my self-esteem that people didn't like me without even knowing me," said Turley, now 18 and a senior in high school in Oregon. "I didn't understand how that could be."

***A pervasive problem***

As many as 25% of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying at some point, said Justin W. Patchin, who studies the phenomenon at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He found that about 10% of teens have been victims of cyberbullying in the last 30 days.

Online bullying has a lot in common with bullying in school: Both behaviors include harassment, humiliation, teasing and aggression, Patchin said. Cyberbullying presents unique challenges in the sense that the perpetrator can attempt to be anonymous, and attacks can happen at any time of day or night.

And among young people, it's rare that an online bully will be a total stranger.

"In our research, about 85% of the time, the target knows who the bully is, and it's usually somebody from their social circle," Patchin said.

Patchin's research has also found that, while cyberbullying is in some sense easier to perpetrate, the kids who bully online also tend to bully at school.

"Technology isn't necessarily creating a whole new class of bullies," he said.

***Long-lasting consequences***

The conversations that need to be happening around cyberbullying extend beyond schools, said Thomas J. Holt, associate professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University.

"How do we extend or find a way to develop policies that have a true impact on the way that kids are communicating with one another, given that you could be bullied at home, from 4 p.m. until the next morning, what kind of impact is that going to have on the child in terms of their development and mental health?" he said.

A recent study in the journal JAMA Psychiatry suggests that both victims and perpetrators of bullying can feel long-lasting psychological effects. Bullying victims showed greater likelihood of agoraphobia, where people don't feel safe in public places, along with generalized anxiety and panic disorder.

People who were both victims and bullies were at higher risk for young adult depression, panic disorder, agoraphobia among females, and the likelihood of suicide among males.

***Reporting cyberbullying***

Since everything we do online has a digital footprint, it is possible to trace anonymous sources of bullying on the Internet, he said. Patchin noted that tangible evidence of cyberbullying may be more clear-cut than "your word against mine" situations of traditional bullying.

Patchin advises that kids who are being cyberbullied keep the evidence, whether it's an e-mail or Facebook post, so that they can show it to adults they trust. Historically, there have been some issues with schools not disciplining if bullying didn't strictly happen at school, but today, most educators realize that they have the responsibility and authority to intervene, Patchin said.

***Even in school, though, solutions are not always clear.***

Turley's mother called the school on his behalf, but the students involved only got a talking-to as punishment. Cyberbullying wasn't considered school-related behavior, at least at that time, he said.

"I was just so afraid of people," says Turley, explaining why he went to different middle schools each year in sixth, seventh and eighth grade. He stayed quiet through most of it, barely speaking to other students.

***Technical solutions to technical problems***

Lieberman's students Birago Jones and Karthik Dinakar are working on an algorithm that would automatically detect bullying language. The research group has broken down the sorts of offensive statements that commonly get made, grouping them into categories such as racial/ethnic slurs, intelligence insults, sexuality accusations and social acceptance/rejection.

While it's not all of the potential bullying statements that could be made online, MIT Media Lab scientists have a knowledge base of about 1 million statements. They've thought about how some sentences, such as "you look great in lipstick and a dress," can become offensive if delivered to males specifically.

The idea is that if someone tries to post an offensive statement, the potential bully would receive a message such as "Are you sure you want to send this?" and some educational material about bullying may pop up. Lieberman does not want to automatically ban people, however.

"If they reflect on their behavior, and they read about the experience of others, many kids will talk themselves out of it," he said.

***Kidshealth.org***

**What Is Cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. By definition, it occurs among young people. When an adult is involved, it may meet the definition of cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking, a crime that can have legal consequences and involve jail time.

Sometimes cyberbullying can be easy to spot — for example, if your child shows you a text message, tweet, or response to a status update on Facebook that is harsh, mean, or cruel. Other acts are less obvious, like impersonating a victim online or posting personal information, photos, or videos designed to hurt or embarrass another person. Some kids report that a fake account, web page, or online persona has been created with the sole intention to harass and bully.

A 2006 poll from the national organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids found that 1 in 3 teens and 1 in 6 preteens have been the victims of cyberbullying. As more and more youths have access to computers and cell phones, the incidence of cyberbullying is likely to rise.

**Effects of Cyberbullying**

No longer limited to schoolyards or street corners, modern-day bullying can happen at home as well as at school — essentially 24 hours a day. As long as kids have access to a phone, computer, or other device (such as an iTouch), they are at risk.

Severe or chronic cyberbullying can leave victims at greater risk for anxiety, depression, and other stress-related disorders. In some rare but highly publicized cases, some kids have turned to suicide.

The punishment for cyberbullies can include being suspended from school or kicked off of sports teams. Certain types of cyberbullying also may violate school codes or even anti-discrimination or sexual harassment laws.

***Signs of Cyberbullying***

Many kids and teens who are cyberbullied are reluctant to tell a teacher or parent, often because they feel ashamed of the social stigma, or because they fear their computer privileges will be taken away at home.

The signs that a child is being cyberbullied vary, but a few things to look for are:

* signs of emotional distress during or after using the Internet or the phone
* being very protective or secretive of their digital life
* withdrawal from friends and activities
* avoidance of school or group gatherings
* slipping grades and "acting out" in anger at home
* changes in mood, behavior, sleep, or appetite

***Other measures to try:***

**Block the bully**. Most devices have settings that allow you to electronically block emails, IMs, or text messages from specific people.

Joking and teasing might seem OK, but it can hurt people's feelings and lead to getting in trouble. Bullying — in any form — is unacceptable; there can be serious (and sometimes irrevocable) consequences at home, school, and in the community if it continues.

***Cyber Bullying Statistics***

Cyber bullying affects many adolescents and teens on a daily basis. Cyber bullying involves using technology, like cell phones and the Internet, to bully or harass another person. Cyber bullying can take many forms:

* Sending mean messages or threats to a person's email account or cell phone
* Spreading rumors online or through texts
* Posting hurtful or threatening messages on social networking sites or web pages
* Stealing a person's account information to break into their account and send damaging messages
* Pretending to be someone else online to hurt another person
* Taking unflattering pictures of a person and spreading them through cell phones or the Internet
* Sexting, or circulating sexually suggestive pictures or messages about a person

Cyber bullying can be very damaging to adolescents and teens. It can lead to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Also, once things are circulated on the Internet, they may never disappear, resurfacing at later times to renew the pain of cyber bullying.

Many cyber bullies think that bullying others online is funny. Cyber bullies may not realize the consequences for themselves of cyberbullying. The things teens post online now may reflect badly on them later when they apply for college or a job. Cyber bullies can lose their cell phone or online accounts for cyber bullying. Also, cyber bullies and their parents may face legal charges for cyber bullying, and if the cyber bullying was sexual in nature or involved sexting, the results can include being registered as a sex offender. Teens may think that if they use a fake name they won't get caught, but there are many ways to track someone who is cyber bullying.

Despite the potential damage of cyber bullying, it is alarmingly common among adolescents and teens. According to Cyber bullying statistics from the i-SAFE foundation:

* Over half of adolescents and teens have been bullied online, and about the same number have engaged in cyber bullying.
* More than 1 in 3 young people have experienced cyberthreats online.
* Over 25 percent of adolescents and teens have been bullied repeatedly through their cell phones or the Internet.
* Well over half of young people do not tell their parents when cyber bullying occurs.

The Harford County Examiner reported similarly concerning cyber bullying statistics:

* Around half of teens have been the victims of cyber bullying
* Only 1 in 10 teens tells a parent if they have been a cyber bully victim
* Fewer than 1 in 5 cyber bullying incidents are reported to law enforcement
* 1 in 10 adolescents or teens have had embarrassing or damaging pictures taken of themselves without their permission, often using cell phone cameras
* About 1 in 5 teens have posted or sent sexually suggestive or nude pictures of themselves to others
* Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to be involved in cyber bullying

The Cyberbullying Research Center also did a series of surveys that found these cyber bullying statistics:

* Over 80 percent of teens use a cell phone regularly, making it the most popular form of technology and a common medium for cyber bullying
* About half of young people have experienced some form of cyber bullying, and 10 to 20 percent experience it regularly
* Mean, hurtful comments and spreading rumors are the most common type of cyber bullying
* Girls are at least as likely as boys to be cyber bullies or their victims
* Boys are more likely to be threatened by cyber bullies than girls
* Cyber bullying affects all races
* Cyber bullying victims are more likely to have low self esteem and to consider suicide
* Teens should not share anything through text or instant messaging on their cell phone or the Internet that they would not want to be made public - remind teens that the person they are talking to in messages or online may not be who they think they are, and that things posted electronically may not be secure.
* Encourage teens never to share personal information online or to meet someone they only know online.

***Teaching Tolerance magazine: Cyberbullying***

Number 38: Fall 2010

Phoebe Prince is loved by her peers. At least, now she is.

 “This” is what some might call bullicide—suicide by bullying.

Before Phoebe Prince hanged herself, she was a new student at South Hadley High School in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Phoebe was a newly arrived Irish immigrant, but that doesn’t seem to be what ignited the ire of her peers—or her own self-doubt. Instead, Phoebe reportedly dared to date boys whom others thought should be off limits to her.

Girls at Phoebe’s school reportedly called her an “Irish slut,” a “whore” and a “bitch,” viciously harassing her in person and on Facebook. Public documents indicate that at least one student gloated after Phoebe took her own life, “I don’t care that she’s dead.”

The Mean Girls, along with two male students, also face an array of criminal charges for allegedly bullying Phoebe Prince. Since then, it’s become clear that Phoebe’s reasons for taking her own life were complicated. She had struggled with depression and had even attempted suicide once before. But the bullying she endured definitely had an impact on her.

These tools give them access to a dizzying array of social media. Some of them, such as Twitter and Facebook, are well known among parents and teachers. But others, such as Formspring, fly well below the radar of most adults. Yet it’s sites like Formspring that can create the biggest headaches. Formspring offers its users total anonymity. That makes it at once a huge draw for curious teenagers and a nearly perfect medium for cyberbullies.