Chapter 7 summaries

Cyberbullying definitions and prevalence

- Many definitions have been offered for cyberbullying.

- Several of these definitions explicitly or implicitly indicate that the bullying behaviour is intentional, although hurt may still occur when it is not the sender's intent to cause harm.

- Comments made online may be misinterpreted by both receivers and third-parties, which may affect the determination of prevalence of cyberbullying.

- Victims of cyberbullying may also avoid reporting their experiences due to fear of repercussions or feelings of shame or embarrassment.

- Studies examining cyberbullying have found wide discrepancies in reported prevalence.

- Cyberbullying can also occur among adults, although this has not been examined as widely as cyberbullying in teenagers and children.

Methods of cyberbullying and comparison to 'traditional' bullying

- The wide variety of online technologies has made it much easier for potential cyberbullies to reach their intended victims.

- Technologies used in cyberbullying include mobile phones, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, file-sharing sites, email, instant messaging, location tagging, blogging, micro-blogging and web publishing software.

- Common methods of cyberbullies include:

    o Social ostracism

    o Disparaging public comments

    o Creation of hurtful/embarrassing content

- o Sharing of confidential information

- o Impersonation

- o Sending harassing communications

- o Name calling, ridiculing, gossiping and spreading of rumours

- o Voting or rating websites

- o Online gaming and virtual worlds

- o Happy-slapping

- Some differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying include:

  - o Perceived or actual anonymity

  - o Online disinhibition

  - o Size of the potential audience

  - o Greater potential contact between the victim and the bully

Traits of cyberbullies

- Some studies have suggested that females are more likely to engage in cyberbullying, but findings are inconsistent across researchers.

- Other characteristics that may be common among cyberbullies are:

  - o Victimisation of traditional bullying

  - o Increased time spent with technology

  - o Offline problems, such as school problems and substance abuse

  - o Certain characteristics, such as impulsiveness, perception of hostility, holding rigid beliefs, reduced empathy and increased aggression.

- It is likely that cyberbullies have similar motives to traditional bullies.

Victims of cyberbullying

- Research suggests that victims of cyberbullying are more likely to be females.

- Consequences of cyberbullying can be severe.

- Consequences can be psychological, emotional and/or social in nature.

- In some cases, victims of cyberbullying are more likely to attempt suicide.

- It is possible that different types of cyberbullying could have different effects on victims

Possible solutions for cyberbullying

- Solutions to the problem of cyberbullying can be preventative, or an attempt to manage an existing cyberbullying problem.

- Many suggested solutions for cyberbullying involve reducing or limiting a child's internet access, an approach which has become increasingly difficult due to the increased prevalence of smartphones.

- Other approaches are psychoeducational in nature, involving teaching appropriate online skills and suitable reactions to cyberbullying incidents.

Cyberstalking definitions and prevalence

- Relatively little research has examined cyberstalking.

- Various definitions of cyberstalking exist, some of which use harassment as a measure (the reaction of the victim), while others focus more on the behaviours of the stalker. The role of intent also varies by definition.

- Victims may not report cyberstalking due to a lack of awareness of its occurrence, a feeling that it is not severe, or a feeling that law enforcement will not take them seriously.

Methods of cyberstalking

- Cyberstalking may remain online, or may be used as part of a strategy which also involves offline stalking aspects.

- Cyberstalking may involve direct messages to the victim, or indirect messages about the victim (Mishra and Mishra, 2008).

- Some behaviours which cyberstalkers engage in include:

    o Public distribution of offensive online messages

    o Damage to files or equipment

    o Physical assault

    o Threats

    o False accusations about the victim

    o Sending abusive messages directly to the victim

    o Gathering information about the victim

    o Encouraging others to harass the victim

    o Ordering goods or services for the victim

    o Attempting to meet the victim

    o Leaving objects for a victim to find

    o Identity theft and impersonation

    o Use of sites that promote retaliation and revenge

    o Use of information brokerage sites.

- Cyberstalking may escalate over time, and may involve an offline partner.

- Anonymity (or perceived anonymity) may facilitate cyberstalking.

- Cyberstalking may occur over large geographical distances.

- 'Electronic propinquity' and 'hyperpersonal communication' may affect the perceptions the cyberstalker holds about their relationship with the victim.

Traits of cyberstalkers

- There is limited research on the traits of cyberstalkers, but their motives are thought to be similar to offline stalkers – specifically regarding to control over their victim.

- Cyberstalking often (but not always) occurs between former romantic partners.

- Cyberstalkers are more likely to be males.

- Some classification systems for stalkers have been proposed.

  - Zona, Sharma and Lane (1993) proposed 'erotomanics', 'love-obsessionals' and 'simple obsessionals'.

  - Mullen, Pathé, Purcell and Stuart (1999) proposed 'rejected', 'intimacy seeking', 'incompetent', 'resentful' and 'predatory' stalkers.

  - Mishra and Mishra (2008) proposed a typology of cyberstalkers, including 'common-obsessionals', 'delusional' and 'vengeful'.

  - McFarlane and Bocij (2005) proposed four types of cyberstalker, including 'vindictive', 'composed', 'intimate' and 'collective'.

- It is thought that stalkers may experience emotional dysregulation and other psychological and social problems.

Victims of cyberstalking

- The majority of cyberstalking victims are female, although there are a higher proportion of male victims than for offline stalking, and some research has found a majority of male victims.

- There are mixed findings regarding the marital status of victims.

- It is possible that those who seek help and advice online are at higher risk of cyberstalking, due to the amount of information they disclose.

- Victims of cyberstalking can experience a wide range of distressing emotions, but some research indicates that the effects can be minimal.

Possible solutions to cyberstalking

- While advice varies, victims of cyberstalking are generally advised to keep communications from stalkers, avoid retaliation, report the incident, inform the stalker that their communications are unwanted, be careful of including personal information on public profiles and log off if a situation becomes hostile.

- The roles of law enforcement agencies and internet agencies are also important in managing cyberstalking.

- It is likely that stalkers will vary in their responses to attempted interventions, and so responses should be tailored appropriately.