Types of Cyber-bullying Involvement and Mental Health Problems

Findings from EU Kids Online, 2014
Dr Anke Görzig
Bullying:
An act of aggression which is intentional, repetitive and directed towards an individual of lower power (cf. Olweus, 1993)

Cyber-bullying:
An act of aggression which is intentional, repetitive and directed towards an individual of lower power using electronic forms of contact, specifically mobile phones or the internet (Smith et al., 2006).
Traditional and cyber-bullying among adolescents are considered a major public health concern (Hertz et al., 2013).

Involvement in bullying as a young person increases the risk of suicide or suicide-related behaviours (i.e., suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, self-harming) (Arseneault et al., 2006; Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Brunstein-Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010; Price & Dalgleish, 2010).

Bullying is associated with short and long-term mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety, conduct disorder) (Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014).

Studies on traditional bullying have shown that it is important to differentiate between different types of bullying involvement (bullies, victims and bully/victims).
**Types of bullying involvement**

- **Suicide-related behaviours**
  - (reviews, 30+ studies; Brunstein-Klomek et al., 2010; Kim & Leventhal, 2008)
  - Bullies and victims are at risk
  - Bully/victims are the most at-risk group

- **Psychological problems**
  - Victims: internalising (emotional problems), peer problems (Hawker & Boulton, 2000)
  - Bullies: externalising (conduct problems) (Ttofi et al., 2011)
  - Bully/victims: internalising + externalising, peer problems (Cook et al., 2010)

- **Psychological problems mediate between bullying and suicide-related behaviours?** (cf. Hertz et al., 2013)
  - Depression: traditional bullies but not cyber-bullies (Bauman et al., 2013)
  - Delinquency/depression: bullies but not victims or bully/victims (Espelage & Holt, 2013)
  - Traditional bullying was a risk factor for suicide-related behaviours independent of depression (Kaminski & Fang, 2009)
Self-harm sites and cyberbullying: the threat to children from web's dark side
(The Guardian, 10.3.2014)

Suicide Among Children Is A Bigger Problem Than Ever Before, And Cyberbullying May Be The Cause
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More children ‘self-harming because of cyber-bullying’
(Metro, 27.5.2014)

Media reports and effects

- Public concern has been amplified by the mass media, most risks are encountered by a small minority (Vandebosch et al., 2013)
- Media reports have contributed to a dramatic bias in views on cyber-bullying (e.g., prevalence rates, cause for suicide etc.; Magid, 2011)
**Types of cyber-bullying involvement**

- **Suicide-related behaviours**
  - Cyber-victims: suicide ideation/attempts, self-harm
  - Cyber-bullies: suicide ideation/attempts
    (Bauman et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Schneider et al., 2012)
  - Cyber-bully/victims: most at-risk group (1 study; 18-24 yr olds)
    (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Schenk, Fremouw, & Keelan, 2013)

- **Psychological problems**
  - Cyber-victims: internalising / emotional problems
  - Cyber-bullies: externalising / conduct problems
  - Cyber-bully/victims: internalising & externalising problems
    (Gradinger et al., 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)

→ **Similar patterns, less evidence**

- **Psychological problems mediate between bullying and suicide-related behaviours?**
The current study

- Research evidence comparing all cyber-bullying types within one sample is scarce

- Confirm similar patterns for bullying and cyber-bullying on
  - Relation of *bullying types* and *suicide-related* behaviours
    - Victims & bullies > not involved
    - Bully/victims >> not involved
  - Relation of *bullying types* *psychological problems*
    - Victims: internalising / emotional problems, peer problems
    - Bullies: externalising / conduct problems
    - Bully/victims: internalising & externalising problems

- Explore whether any links of cyber-bullying types with viewing of suicide-related web-content is mediated by psychological problems
Random stratified sample: ~ 1000 9-16 year old internet users per country; total of 25142 internet-users, 25 countries

Fieldwork in spring/summer 2010; child + parent interviews at home, face to face

Questions validated by cognitive/pilot testing; self-completion for sensitive questions; care with research ethics

Informed by national stakeholders and an international advisory panel

Survey covered access, use, activities, risks (sexual images, sexual messages, bullying, meeting strangers), parental mediation, coping, vulnerability
Cyber-bullying

Saying or doing hurtful or nasty things to someone. This can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include:

– teasing someone in a way this person does not like
– hitting, kicking or pushing someone around
– leaving someone out of things

When people are hurtful or nasty to someone in this way, it can happen:

– face to face (in person)
– by mobile phones (texts, calls, video clips)
– on the internet (e-mail, instant messaging, social networking, chatrooms)
Saying or doing hurtful or nasty things to someone. This can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include:

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- face to face (in person)
- by mobile phones (texts, calls, video clips)
- on the internet (e-mail, instant messaging, social networking, chatrooms)
In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen websites where people discuss...

- ways of committing suicide
- ways of physically harming or hurting themselves

Suicide

Self-harm

*(11+ yrs., N = 19,406)*
Psychological Problems*

Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1998)

- Emotional difficulties, e.g. “I am often unhappy, sad or tearful.”
- Peer problems, e.g. “Other people my age generally like me.” (reversed)
- Conduct problems, e.g. “I get very angry and often lose my temper.”
  - 5 items each, 3-point scale: (1 = Not true, 2 = A bit true, 3 = Very true)

Borderline clinical cut-off points (Goodman et al., 2000)

- Used widely for screening in CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services)
  - Emotional difficulties: sum > 6
  - Peer problems: sum > 4
  - Conduct problems: sum > 4

*(11+ yrs., N = 19,406)
Results

Percentages for Viewing of Suicide-Related Web-Content within Cyber-bullying Involvement Types.

Dr Anke Görzig
Results

Percentages for Psychological Problems within Cyber-bullying Involvement Types.
Multi-Nominal Regressions:
Viewing of Web-Content and Psychological Problems
on Cyber-bullying Involvement Type

Regression – Step 1 (viewing of web content only)
Odds Ratios (reference group: not involved; controls: age, gender)

Web Content

Self-harm
Victim only
Bully only
Bully-victim

Suicide
Victim only
Bully only
Bully-victim

Solid fill indicate statistically significant coefficients
Multi-Nominal Regressions: Viewing of Web-Content and Psychological Problems on Cyber-bullying Involvement Type

Regression – Step 2 (+ psych problems)
Odds Ratios (reference group: not involved; controls: age, gender)

**Web Content**

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Solid fill indicate statistically significant coefficients
Discussion: Bullying & cyber-bullying
Similar patterns?

- **Suicide-related web content**
  - Cyber-bully/victims most vulnerable
  - Generally all involved groups more at risk than not involved
  - *Exception*: suicide – cyber-bullies no higher prevalence than not involved

- **Psychological problems**
  - Cyber-victims: emotional problems, peer problems
  - Cyber-bullies: conduct problems
  - Bully/victims: emotional problems, conduct problems
  - *Exception*: conduct problems - cyber-victims higher prevalence than not involved

- **Psychological problems mediate between bullying and suicide-related behaviours?**
  - No change in coefficients when controlling for psychological problems
  - Possible bi-directional nature of bullying and psychological problems (Kowalski & Limber, 2013)
Limitations

Cross-sectional study: no implications about causality

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Intentions of viewing suicide-related web-content
Implications

- Mental health problems for different cyber-bullying involvement types on the whole resemble those for bullying involvement types

- Same kind of youth involved in online and offline risks (Görzig & Livingstone, 2014)

- Integrative prevention and intervention strategies (Finkelhor, 2014; Livingstone & Smith, 2014)

- Focus on adolescents’ specific problems and developmental needs (Jones et al., 2013)

- Adolescents involved in (cyber-)bullying need support
  - Targeted towards involvement type
  - Prevent the causes and/or consequences of mental health problems
THANK YOU!

Findings from *EU Kids Online, 2014*
Dr Anke Görzig