Institute of Medicine &
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Academies

Workshop:
Building Capacity to Reduce Bullying & its
Impact on Youth Across the Lifecourse
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Faye Mishna
Professor & Dean
McCain Family Chair in Child & Family

Session 4: Technology-Based Interventions
Children & Youth in The Cyber World
The Cyber World
Has Created a New Social Environment for Youth...

Texting  Email  Chat  Social Media
YouTube  Apps  Webcams  Blogs

...Always Advancing
Technology Use By Children & Youth

- Youth are increasingly immersed in cyber environment
  - 99% have cyber access outside school
  - U.S. youth spend more than 7 hours per day with digital ICTs, often cyber settings

- Media focuses on negatives, overlooks positives

- To reach youth, must understand what platforms are used & how, & must keep up with constant changes
Importance of Technology for Children & Youth

- Never experienced a world without ICTs

- **Use ICTs to:** explore problems; develop identity; access information, resources & support; develop networks & communities; & communicate with peers
  - Especially helpful to youth lacking offline support

- Communication & learning styles increasingly suited to ICTs
  - Need for cyber strategies & interventions
Importance of Technology for Children & Youth

- Adults may perceive youth as more technically proficient, & therefore struggle to intervene or mediate ICT use

- Youth may possess technical proficiency, but often lack the critical thinking & decision-making skills necessary for always using ICTs safely & appropriately
  - Often, young people make right decisions, but slip up (some more than others, & we know from research that certain youth are more vulnerable)
Motivations for Cyber Bullying Study: Preliminary Findings

- 3 year, longitudinal, mixed methods; grades 4, 7, 10

- Definitions & meanings associated with cyber behaviour may differ considerably between adults & youth
  - e.g., Normalization

- Youth may not consider many actions, particularly among friends, as cyber bullying:
  - “Drama”
  - “Trash Talk”
Disclosure

- Youth often do not disclose bullying/cyber bullying to adults
- Disclosure can be very difficult & opportunities for disclosure are limited
- Youth: don’t want to make a “big deal”
- By the time they tell adults (parents, teachers), the situation may have become worse
I didn’t want to make a pretty big deal of it… I was thinking it’s just messages on Facebook and that’s it… that’s why I didn’t tell any teacher, or… the police or even my parents… I didn’t want to make a big deal of it… I just didn’t want other people to worry, and I didn’t want other people to handle my problems… it’s my problem, why would my parents have to do it for me… I was pretty sure they were busy with other problems, other than their son being bullied. (Male, Grade 10)
Disclosure: Improving Opportunities

- Opportunities need to be highly accessible
- Control over the process is important
- Cyber interventions may represent an accessible way to disclose incidents without making it a “big deal”
Cyber Interventions
Existing Interventions

- **Offline interventions**
  - Range of prevention/intervention programs exist
  - Findings tend to be mixed & inconclusive
  - Programs often not measured for efficacy

- **Cyber interventions/campaigns**
  - Available initiatives may not be helpful, may not be comprehensive enough, or may miss target population
  - Potential to cause harm
    - e.g., *It Gets Better* Project
    - Poor moderation of interactive platforms on sites, e.g., discussion boards

- Necessary for online campaigns to provide “tangible resources” to support struggling youth
In Grade 4… they had someone come in and… talk to us about cyber bullying. Then my teacher… had [us], like, make a ‘stop bullying’ poster… I don't think those really help because it's like it's just a contest, people don't really care. In my old school we had a contest, stop bullying poster thing, so when we did that, it didn't really even help, all you get was a prize and that's it, then they just take the poster and hang it up, that's it. (Female, Grade 7)
Potential of Cyber Interventions

- Provide safe, sometimes anonymous way to access help & resources, as well as gain support

- 1/3 of youth seek health information online; need to ensure accurate information available

- Sites to help youth with certain issues (e.g., depression) found to be moderately effective, interactive sites most promising

- Evidence informed school-based interventions using cyber technology as a learning tool may be somewhat efficacious in increasing student knowledge
Example: Kids Help Phone (kidshelpphone.ca)

- Found youth are increasingly communicating with the organization through online services, rather than phone & that the online services tend to attract new & younger users.
- Found web users may be more likely to disclose self-harming behaviours.
- Suggests that dimensions of distress (& perhaps bullying) may be more readily disclosed online than in person.
Cyber Interventions: Future Directions

Need:

- To be continuous (not single event)
- To be implemented in conjunction with other strategies
  - Most effective when used in conjunction with traditional therapeutic supports
- To be tailored to youth with various needs (e.g., universal, at-risk)
- To continually adapt to youth’s cyber use
- To be accessible & easy to use to reduce barriers
- Research on efficacy of existing interventions & how they can be improved to prevent harmful outcomes
Thank You!

Faye Mishna
f.mishna@utoronto.ca
@Fayemi


