

Chapter 2

Cyberbullying

Abstract Young people's experience in the online environment is holistic. They use this environment to communicate, socialise, learn, research, complete home-work and play. Their offline and online environments tend to blend into one which creates challenges in separating offline and online worlds for some young people. Cyberbullying amongst young people is more likely to occur outside of school hours however, the behaviours carry over from home to school and vice versa and can escalate quickly. Cyberbullying is a societal issue occurring in workplaces, families, institutions and any environment where power is misused and relationships are in conflict and requires a more complex relationship management based approach. The serious long term effects of cyberbullying, such as the higher prevalence of youth depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem, reinforce the need to address the issue effectively within a broad social context. Social media plays a role and young people need to be aware of the risks online and their digital footprint.

Keywords Cyberbullying • Young people • Prevalence • Forms of cyberbullying • Age and gender • Impacts of cyberbullying • Social media • Online risks • Digital footprint

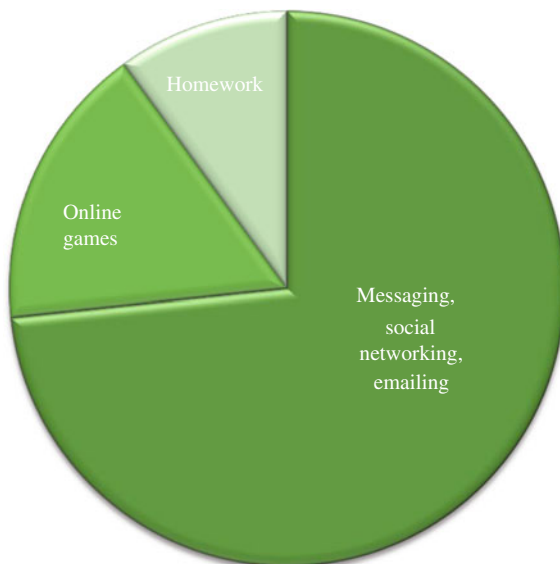
2.1 The Online Environment for Young People

Most young people have regular access to online environments through home, school and even public libraries. Online environments are an important part of their education, social connections and recreation and they are the key 'users' in their engagement with the online world. Young people use the internet for an average of 1 h and 17 min each day.¹

This equates to:

¹ McGrath (2009).

Fig. 2.1 Daily internet use for young Australians



- almost 50 min of using the internet for messaging, visiting social websites and emailing;
- 15 min for online games with other players; and
- 13 min for homework.

Young people's capabilities within their online environment varies. Some young people have sound knowledge and skills which enable them to make good decisions regarding their online behaviour; some are more naïve and need education; some are more vulnerable and lack the social skills and resilience to cope with inappropriate encounters. Young people with mental health problems or disabilities are often vulnerable in the online environment. Young people identified as 'high-risk' in the offline world due to abuse or neglect are also 'high-risk' online. They are usually socially isolated and have experienced poor relationships with parents or other family members (Fig. 2.1).

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) find more young people are becoming savvy online. They are increasingly aware of not disclosing names or passwords to others online yet cybersafety initiatives need to be continually promoted. However, many young people falsify their age online. Social networking sites require a minimum age of 13 though young people are able to change their dates of birth so they can join with limited verification. There are difficulties in verifying the age of young people online and some parents grant permission for their children to join these sites. The age requirement for social networking sites has been established for privacy reasons, websites are prohibited from collecting information on children younger than 13 years without parental permission. Falsifying age is becoming a common practice amongst young people

and some parents. The message parents send by this practice is that lying is ok. There are some websites developed specifically for younger children which do not have an age restriction. Many young people have indicated they have ‘chatted’ with people online they don’t know.

Young people’s experience in the online environment is holistic. They use this environment to communicate, socialise, learn, research, complete homework and play. Their offline and online environments tend to blend into one which creates challenges in separating offline and online worlds for some young people. Due to this holistic approach, young people share a great deal of information about themselves online. For instance:

- name;
- age or birthday;
- address;
- telephone/mobile number;
- school attended;
- bank account details;
- holiday plans;
- passwords or email addresses; and
- photos.

This level of information is part of the ‘identity mosaic’ young people want to present to others. Young people want to strengthen offline relationships through online communications as well as seek out new online networks. ACMA’s report, *Click and Connect*, found that purposeful divulgence of personal details was commonplace. Sometimes personal information was divulged without an understanding of the potential consequences of disclosure.²

Whilst many adults are relatively new to the online environment and use it primarily for functions such as banking, shopping and emailing, young people use the online environment for different reasons. Pre-school aged children tend to visit children’s websites, or those associated with their favourite show and email family members. Primary school aged children develop a growing confidence in visiting chat rooms and experimenting with search engines to download material. Adolescents are more independent and increasingly view online environments as social enablers. The age of the first use of the internet in Australia is at about 5 years old³ with families of 6–10 year olds regularly involved in their internet access.

There are now approximately 2.2 million Australian children actively engaging online and the most common age group for entry into the online environment are 10–11 year olds.⁴ The use of mobile phones and other wireless devices follows this early introduction and once in the online environment access through schools,

² ACMA (2009).

³ ACMA (2007).

⁴ McGrath (2009).

libraries and homes of friends will emerge. Some of this access will be unsupervised by an adult (Table 2.1).

2.1.1 Prevalence of Cyberbullying

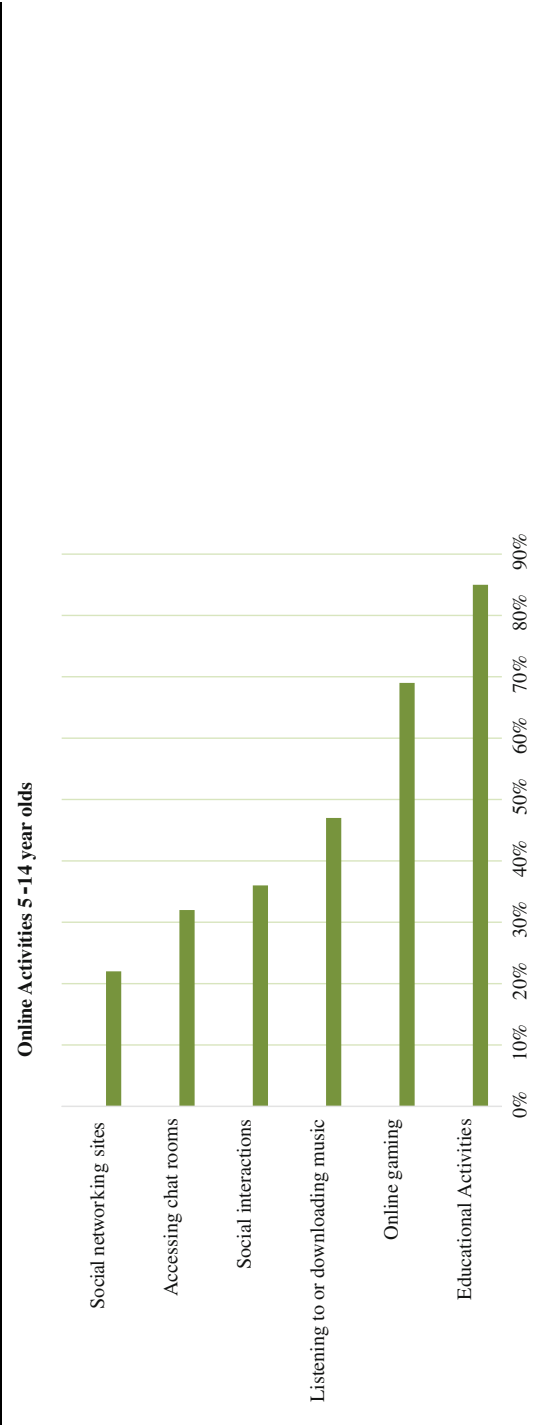
Cyberbullying amongst young people is more likely to occur outside of school hours however, the behaviours carry over from home to school and vice versa and can escalate quickly. The most common place for cyberbullying to occur is at home followed by at school. It is recognised cyberbullying is not a problem isolated to schools. It is also a societal issue occurring in workplaces, families, institutions and any environment where power is misused and relationships are in conflict.

Limited research has been conducted into cyberbullying as it is a relatively new phenomenon though there are similarities between online bullying and offline bullying. An estimated 200 million children and young people globally are being bullied by their peers, according to the 2007 Kandersteg Declaration Against Bullying in Children and Youth. However, there is a lack of consistent and robust data on the prevalence of cyberbullying due to different assumptions leading to different methodologies. In addition without a common definition of cyberbullying there can be some confusion and ambiguity with survey questions. Reports in literature range from 4 to 42 % of all young people experiencing cyberbullying. Australian data suggests between 19 and 27 % are bullied at school and 10 % report being cyberbullied. Rates for cyberbullying are not as high as offline bullying though the widespread use of technology in recent years and experience from America and Britain suggests the increased potential for cyberbullying. The Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance (AUCRA) found rates of cyberbullying remained at under 22 % with females reporting higher rates than males.⁵

Under-reporting of cyberbullying by young people is evident. It is not reported to adults—teachers and parents—as often as offline forms of bullying behaviours, however, young people are more likely to speak with their parents than to teachers. Young people find it difficult to report cyberbullying because of the perceived shame associated with the incidents and the likelihood of reliving the experience. Young people are more likely to confide in their friends as much of the cyberbullying occurs without the knowledge of parents or teachers. In many studies females experience cyberbullying more frequently than males and most are reluctant to report. It is important to recognise who is engaging in the bullying behaviours: 46 % are other students; 34 % were friends; 16 % were siblings and about 1/3 did not know who it was Table 2.2.

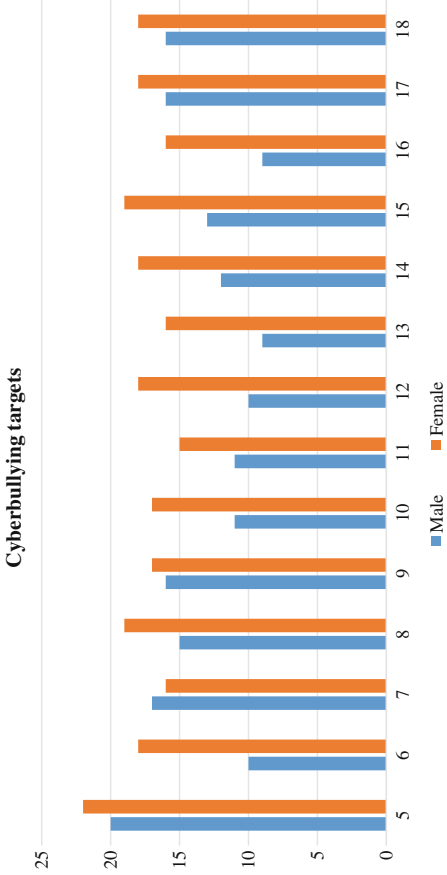
⁵ AUCRA (2010).

Table 2.1 Frequent online activities for 5–14 year olds^a



^a ABS (2009)

Table 2.2 Proportion (%) of those who have been targets of cyberbullying in past 12 months by age and gender^a



^a AUCRA (2010)

An Australian study of covert bullying found there is also slightly higher rates of cyberbullying amongst secondary students and students from non-government schools.⁶ Differences were also found in each age group regarding the mode of technology most prevalent for cyberbullying both within school and outside of school. This study also found cyberbullying is related to age and access to technology with older students more likely to engage in cyberbullying than younger students. The most common age to experience cyberbullying is during the transitional stages between primary and secondary schools then decreases towards the end of secondary school. Difficulties in forming positive relationships between school friends can lead to an increase in cyberbullying. Empathy for students who are being bullied decreases with age and if the student is male. This reflects data and research regarding offline bullying behaviours (Table 2.3).

The following international statistics are useful.

- nearly 43 % of young people have been bullied online
- 7–10 % of students are cyberbullied each term
- 70 % of students report seeing frequent online bullying
- over 80 % of young people use a mobile phone making it the most common medium
- 68 % of young people agree cyberbullying is a serious problem
- 81 % of young people think online bullying is easier to get away with than offline bullying
- 90 % of young people who have seen social networking bullying say they have ignored it
- 48 % of young people being cyberbullied do not report the incident
- 1:10 young people who are being bullied inform a parent or trusted adult
- girls are about twice as likely as boys to engage in, or be on the receiving end of, cyberbullying
- 58 % of children admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online
- 4:10 say it occurred more than once
- 75 % have visited a website ‘bashing’ another student
- young people who are cyberbullied are 2–9 times more likely to consider suicide
- hacking and cracking into social networking sites of others is high
- young people who bully have a one in four chance of having a criminal record by the age of 30
- bullying is the fourth most common reason young people seek help from children’s help services

(Smith et al. 2008⁷; Hinduja and Patchin 2008⁸; Cross et al. 2009⁹).

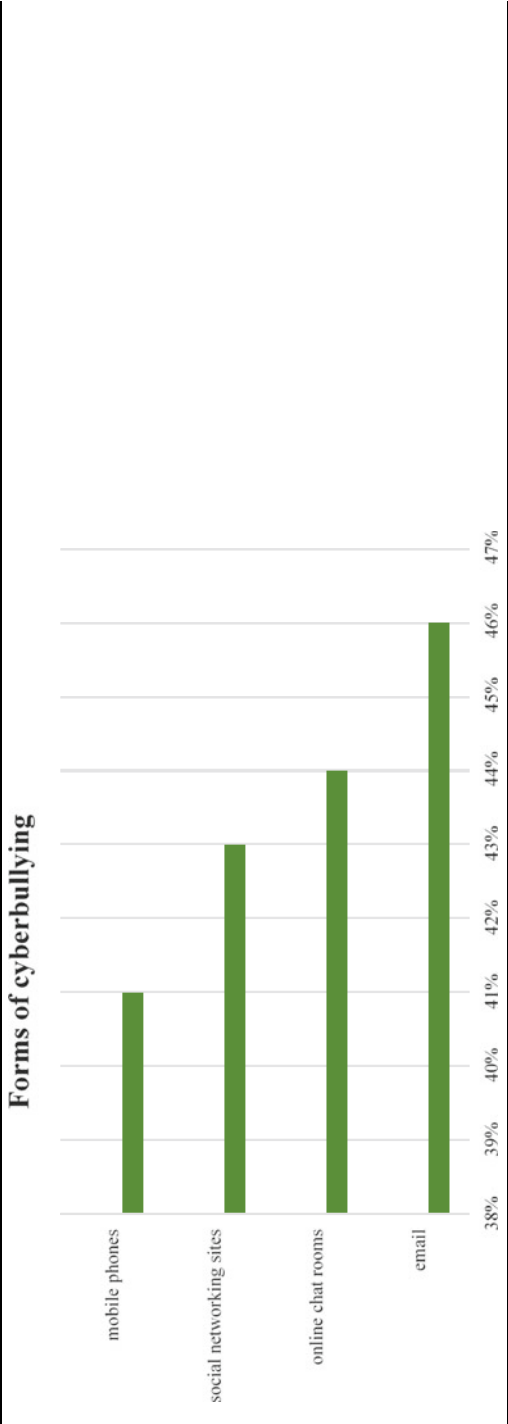
⁶ Cross et al. (2009).

⁷ Smith et al. (2008).

⁸ Hinduja and Patchin (2008).

⁹ Cross et al. (2009).

Table 2.3 Common forms of cyberbullying



2.1.2 Gender Differences

There are gender patterns between females and males in regards to cyberbullying. Females prefer to engage in cyberbullying indirectly using relational means and are more likely to use the internet in order to attack their targets. Types of relational bullying or aggression include:

- gossiping;
- spreading rumours;
- friendship betrayal;
- excluding people; and
- other behaviours which manipulate relationships.¹⁰

Cyberbullying may be more prevalent than offline bullying however the focus on cyberbullying appears to be similar to the focus of offline bullying for females. The majority of cyberbullying is carried out by females and is consistent with the types of indirect bullying offline.

Females are often involved in cyberbullying as both target and those engaging in bullying behaviours. Females are more likely to be cyberbullied by text messages and phone calls than males¹¹ due to the relational aggression i.e. threats, blackmail, destroying friendships.¹² Females report when they do engage in cyberbullying they usually gossiped about or ignored someone. In the same study by Dehue et al. (2008), females reported being targets of cyberbullying more often via MSN, hacking or email. Stalking online also emerges as a common type of cyberbullying behaviour amongst females. In addition, females tend to be online more than males, for socialising purposes using emails, social networking sites and blogs more frequently than males. Female targets report problems such as harassment and threats being posted on their personal networking sites.

Male bullying more frequently involves physical altercations with fewer being the targets of online bullying than females. Males tend to spend more time online to play games¹³ or watch movies etc. However, when males do engage in cyberbullying it is likely to involve posting hurtful pictures or videos (Table 2.4).

2.1.3 Impacts and Implications of Cyberbullying

The serious long term effects of cyberbullying, such as the higher prevalence of youth depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem, reinforce the need to address the issue effectively within a broad social context. The increased rate of poor mental

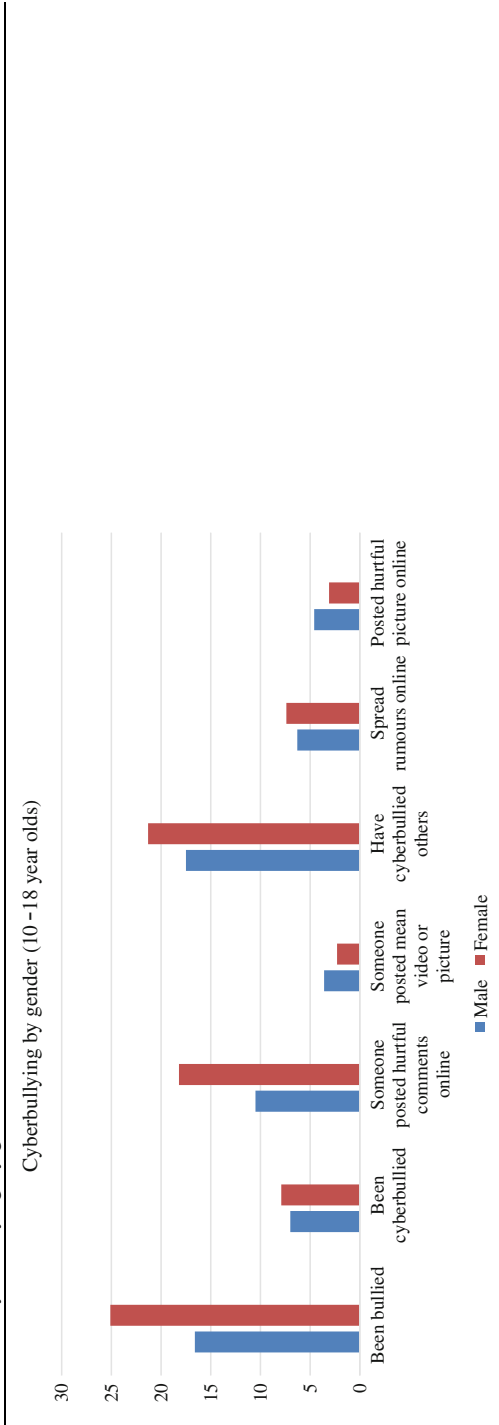
¹⁰ Viljoen et al. (2005).

¹¹ Smith et al. (2008).

¹² Dehue et al. (2008).

¹³ Dowell et al. (2009).

Table 2.4 Cyberbullying by gender^a



^a Hinduja and Patchin (2010)

health among young people has contributed to a wealth of programs designed to address a range of issues, particularly bullying behaviours. Cyberbullying is being recognised as an issue for workplaces, in relationships as well as in school communities. Society can no longer perpetuate the myth young people grow out of such behaviours. They need to be given the opportunity to be presented with a range of possible strategies from which they may choose an appropriate one for a particular situation.¹⁴ Cyberbullying impacts upon both those engaging in the bullying behaviours and those on the receiving end.

Sawyer (cited in National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2000¹⁵) indicates 14 % of 4–17 year olds suffer from mental health problems. He also found rates of depression increased when relationships were poor, young people were less connected and young people were less involved. The British Medical Journal¹⁶ published findings from an Australian study which demonstrated students who were bullied tended to be unhappy at school. However, these students enjoyed school but felt isolated and unsupported. This study also found students who bullied and were bullied had the greatest number of psychological and psychosomatic symptoms.

Cyberbullying rarely occurs in isolation, typically other students are aware of its occurrence. It is recognised bullying behaviours are fundamentally about relationship issues.¹⁷ It is of critical importance students understand the significant role bystanders can play as their decision to become proactive can have a major influence in reducing cyberbullying within the school and even the wider community.

School culture also has a significant impact on cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can be entrenched in the culture of a school and the way in which teachers respond to offline and online bullying is imperative in dealing effectively with the issue. In some instances, the level of offline and online bullying behaviours perceived to occur in the school can impact upon its reputation. Schools need to continually build positive relationships with, and among, students and to give the issue constant attention.¹⁸

Research indicates there are long-term consequences for those who engage in persistent and systematic bullying behaviours. Lodge (2010)¹⁹ posits an increase in juvenile anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, shoplifting and graffiti. Her research also demonstrated social and academic difficulties amongst students who frequently engage in bullying behaviours.

There is also a causal link between cyberbullying and depression, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. It is increasingly clear any participation in bullying

¹⁴ Hess et al. (2000).

¹⁵ Sawyer (2000).

¹⁶ British Medical Journal (1999).

¹⁷ Pepler and Craig (2000).

¹⁸ Chadwick (2010).

¹⁹ Lodge (2010).

behaviours increases the risk of suicidal ideation and/or behaviours in a broad spectrum of youth.²⁰ The strongest association between involvement in bullying behaviours and depression, suicidal ideation and attempts can be found among those students who both engage in bullying behaviours and are being bullied.

Cyberbullying and victimisation have system-wide negative consequences. The natural tendency of a social group is to perpetuate itself. There are hidden influences in the peer group which encourage those who engage in cyberbullying to continue engaging in this behaviour and those who are being bullied to continue to be targeted.

Long-term consequences of cyberbullying are associated with perceived difficulties, hyperactivity, conduct problems, low pro-social behaviour, frequent smoking and drunkenness, psychosomatic symptoms i.e. headaches, stomach aches, and not feeling safe at school.²¹ In addition students are more likely to engage in criminal activity as young adults, carry weapons and become violent outside of school and are involved in aggressive or abusive behaviour as adults.²²

It can be suggested cyberbullying increases potential psychological consequences, such as loneliness, peer rejection, low self-esteem, poor mental health, depression, isolation, and hopelessness.²³ Whilst cyberbullying does not lead directly to suicide amongst young people there may be instances where the abuse is prolonged and systematic the person feels this is their only option. Peer harassment contributes to depression, decreased self-worth, hopelessness and loneliness—all of which are precursors to suicidal thoughts and behaviour.²⁴ Depression, hopelessness, and isolation have been linked to suicide. A phenomenon now being termed *cyberbullicide*²⁵ which is suicide directly or indirectly influenced by experiences with online bullying and aggression. These are isolated occurrences and do not reflect the norm however research by Hinduja and Patchin identified upward trends in 10–19 year olds. Cyberbullying victims were almost twice as likely to have attempted suicide compared to young people who had not experienced cyberbullying. Caution dictates many young people who have suicide ideation or commit suicide have often experienced other emotional and social issues in their lives. Cyberbullying could be viewed as the ‘tipping point’ for these young people.

Bullying behaviours, offline and online, impact on the climate of a school whether students are directly or indirectly involved. Peers serve as reinforcers and models of behaviour, and consequently classrooms containing high numbers of students with poor academic skills or behaviour problems are likely to promote these behaviours

²⁰ Kim and Levethal (2008).

²¹ Sourander et al. (2010).

²² Lodge (2010).

²³ Hinduja and Patchin (2010).

²⁴ Hinduja and Patchin (2010).

²⁵ Hinduja and Patchin (2010).

Table 2.5 Descriptors to describe how cyberbullying made young people feel^a

Isolated	Vulnerable	Lonely
Excluded	Rejected	Powerless
Challenged	Bewildered	Depressed
Unsafe	Violated	Threatened

^a Spears et al. (2008)

in individual students.²⁶ Poorer classroom environments were associated with poorer levels of student aggression, peer relations, and academic focus.

Students who are witnessing cyberbullying occurring can often feel anger, guilt, fear, powerlessness and sadness toward the student being bullied.²⁷ At times they can also experience the same negative feelings as those being bullied. Bystanders report a similar, if not greater, psychological impact as they believe the same behaviours could happen to them in the future.²⁸ Many students also feel guilty for not being able to intervene.

A culture within schools can also be created where bullying behaviours are accepted due to the feelings of powerlessness and isolation.²⁹ Research indicates some students believe cyberbullying could not be prevented in their schools. Students may consistently not attend school or have a desire to change schools.

Due to the covert nature of cyberbullying the impacts have the potential to be more severe psychologically, socially and emotionally. Cyberbullying magnifies offline bullying behaviours and affects mental, social and academic wellbeing of those being bullied. Short-term impacts include anxiety and depression, long-term impacts include health and social adjustment problems. Cyberbullying can also be malicious in content and the added complexity of not knowing the identity of those engaging in the behaviour increases the impacts on mental health issues for young people. The potential for humiliation in seeing posts or images online and being forwarded on and re-broadcast adds to the feelings of hopelessness and their perceived inability to escape from the ‘attacks’. Emotional responses of young people vary from sadness to anger, frustration, and embarrassment to fear (Table 2.5).

2.1.4 Role of Social Media

The use of social media websites is the most common activity for young people worldwide though research on the impact of social media on young people is only recent. Any website which allows social interaction is a ‘social media’ site i.e.

²⁶ Barth et al. (2004).
²⁷ Batsche and Porter (2006).
²⁸ Rivers et al. (2009).
²⁹ Salmivalli and Voeten (2004).

social networking sites, gaming sites, virtual worlds, video sites and blogs. These sites have grown exponentially in recent years and provide a world of entertainment and communication for young people. However reality is becoming blurred between our offline and online worlds. A large proportion of this generations social and emotional development is occurring while online and through their mobile phones. This has led to increases in cyberbullying as well as privacy issues and other recent phenomena such as 'sexting' and internet addiction. Social media sites provide the forum for young people to participate online in the same way as they conduct their lives offline through connecting with friends and family, sharing photos and making new friends and expanding their networks.

Young people are also using social media to connect with others to complete homework and projects with some schools using blogs as teaching tools. Infographics are also becoming popular with the ability for young people to share and embed these within social media. Increased use of social media has been found to improve friendships and enables young people in remote areas to connect with others. For others it enables freedom of expression and engagement where face-to-face contact is limited.

Evidence is emerging social media provides a new way to promote social inclusion for young people. Many young people are marginalised or isolated because of their circumstances; however online social networking and digital media production can enable young people who are vulnerable to mental health difficulties to connect with others in meaningful ways which can positively affect their wellbeing. Most contact in the online world is with people they already know in the offline world and is used for both friendships and interest-based interactions. However, some young people do engage and interact with people they do not know in areas such as 'online communities' where there is an exchange of information or opinions on various topics. Within these 'communities' young people are interacting with others from different socio-economic backgrounds and different ages.

Emerging research in the field of digital technology use by young people and their communities at De Montfort University, UK³⁰ has identified a range of impacts on social capital and social cohesion resulting from the use of digital technologies by young people and their communities. Young people use social media extensively for collaboration and communication.

Today, 43 % of the world's population is 25 years old or younger. This young group is impatient and ready to change the world. Change for this generation has everything to do with people. Some 70 % of young people believe social media is a force for change.

³⁰ Boeck and Thomas (2010).

2.1.5 Awareness of Online Risks

Cyberbullying is not the only risk for young people online. The online environment presents some challenges for young people—peer-to-peer inappropriate content; lack of understanding of privacy issues; sharing too much information about themselves; posting false information about themselves or others; and outside influences by third-party advertising groups or potential predators.

There is also the risk of ownership of content posted online as many young people are becoming more concerned about who ‘owns’ their personal information online and in particular on social media. For some young people it is confronting to know some social media sites ‘sell’ private information to third-parties. There is a growing concern among young people in Australia of being targeted by advertising campaigns. In addition, the knowledge for young people that content posted such as personal information, opinions expressed and images cannot be deleted or removed permanently from the online environment.

Internet stranger danger appears to be over-exaggerated³¹ though the potential danger does exist, the situation is a complex one and not as frightening as often portrayed. Young people are at more risk from someone they know or a family member than they are from an internet stranger. Studies by the Internet Safety Technical Task Force (ISTTF) found internet-related sex crimes are a small proportion of all sex crimes committed against young people. Internet predators are usually the same age or no more than 7 years older and have a tendency to use what is termed e-seduction rather than coercion. Young people who are drawn in by this usually display patterns of risk-taking behaviour offline and often agree to meet in person on the pretext of engaging in sexual activity.

Grooming refers to a range of behaviours which are calculated to enable an offender to procure a young person for sexual activity. Technology has not shown to increase the number of paedophiles though it has provided access to young people as personal information is easily found online. Most offenders who initiate sexual contact via the internet meet their targets in chat rooms³² and this may be preceded by cyber-stalking. Research indicates 75 % of young people who meet the adult do so on more than one occasion and suggests the adult is using young people’s natural curiosity towards sex and sexuality to build relationships—no matter how inappropriate.³³

Photo sharing is another potential online risk for many reasons—privacy, ownership, inability to permanently remove or delete to name a few. Young people choose to post specific content online and photo sharing illustrates these risks. They could be exposing themselves or others to issues of permission, ownership and right of the individual to ‘own’ their personal information. There appears to be an absence of requiring or seeking permission to post a photo of someone else in a

³¹ ISTTF (2008).

³² Cross et al. (2009).

³³ Ybarra and Mitchell (2008).

public forum. Posting of specific content may also impact upon relationships when photos are either reposted or there is a request to remove the photo. At times when a relationship deteriorates the images may be posted online as a form of cyberbullying. Young people can learn a considerable amount from adults regarding the value of personal information and personal safety.

Linked to photo sharing is 'sexting'. This is a new risk to online activities and can be defined as sending, receiving or forwarding sexually explicit or suggestive messages, photographs or images via mobile phones or other digital devices. There is limited data available on how common this is amongst young people and might be due to young people not being willing to admit to this behaviour though it is becoming 'normalised behaviour' in adolescent culture. American research revealed 20 % of young people aged 13–19 have electronically sent or posted online nude or semi-nude images or videos of themselves—22 % female and 18 % male. 51 % of females in this age group said pressure from a male was the reason they sexted compared to just 18 % of males in this age group who said they felt pressure from a female.³⁴ At the same time, the risks to females are greater because generally, society judges girls and women far more harshly for sexual exhibitions than it judges boys and men.

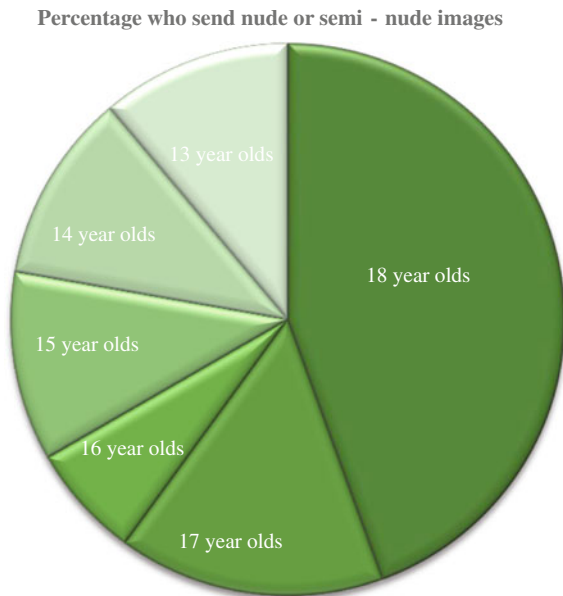
However, young people refer to these self-portrait photos using a camera phone as 'selfies'. Selfies are commonly posted on social networking or photo sharing services. They are often casual, are typically taken either with a camera held at arm's length or in a mirror, and may include only the photographer or other people as well. Images of a sexually explicit nature which are saved, uploaded or forwarded have legal implications as it is by law distributing child pornography if the subject is under-age. This raises moral, ethical, legal and parenting concerns and more research is required to understand the motives for the behaviour. Concerns about criminal sanctions and complying with legislation need to be considered within the context of educating young people about the risks and the long-term consequences (Fig. 2.2).

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) was first described in the 1990s however there is no official recognition of PIU by authorities in most major countries. There may be a predisposition in the media to promote internet addiction with limited validity. Excessive internet use is seen by some adults as a risk for many adolescents. Gaming is considered the major issue for many young boys as this is viewed as their social networking site. Young people may 'escape' their offline worlds by immersing themselves in their online world however, this should be addressed as a social issue rather than a technology issue. Whilst it is recognised some young people over-engage in the online environment there is no conclusive evidence to term this an 'addiction'.

Finally, identity theft can occur when personal information is obtained and used to obtain benefit. The fact many young people share or disclose information such as their date of birth, mobile phone numbers and other identifiers i.e. credit card

³⁴ National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2013).

Fig. 2.2 Percentage of young people by age who send nude or semi-nude images (Australia)



details or, passport numbers can lead to an increased risk of identity theft. Some young people also post and share personal information about their parents or siblings and thereby expose them to the risk of identity theft. Third-parties can use this information to obtain false or fake documents. However, many online documents have ‘mandatory fields’ and this presents further concerns as it’s not possible to complete forms. Young people could also be more prone to cyberbullying with the level of detail others have regarding their personal information as social networking sites could be compromised or accessed without permission.

2.1.6 Digital Footprint

Every time an individual visits any website, they leave behind traces of which sites they have visited. This is commonly termed a ‘digital footprint’ and is an emerging threat to young people on social media. Our digital footprint can influence our reputations in future. Young people are not always aware that ‘what goes online, stays online’, the internet never forgets. Whilst images, posts and other messages can be ‘deleted’ or removed, there will *always* be a footprint. This may impact on future job or university prospects or alternately make young people more vulnerable to marketers or people wanting to defraud them. Many recruiters, employers and HR people have been known to reject a candidate based on information found online and in fact some insist an online search is undertaken for any candidate.

Our online image is equally as important as the image we present to people in our offline world. Disclosing more about ourselves online can actually decrease intimacy and satisfaction in our face-to-face relationships. Researchers are beginning to investigate how our online disclosures mirror who we are offline as more of our lives are being lived in both the physical and virtual worlds.

A fast growing industry is ‘data mining’, where a range of information is collected about an individual. Whilst primarily this is used for advertising and market research purposes, the footprint remains of every website, post, message or image.

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Chadwick, S.

2014, XV, 89 p. 18 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-04030-1