

Foreword: An International Perspective on Cyberbullying

Over the past 30 years, a revolution has occurred in how we understand and deal with bullying in schools. No doubt bullying has occurred ever since schools came into being; but for many decades it was ignored or denied. Since the 1980s however, social scientists, educators, teachers, and parents have combined efforts to raise awareness of the negative effects that school bullying can have, and to find ways to reduce and prevent it. In fact, a very considerable research program on school bullying has developed over this period. I have argued (Smith 2014) that this has gone through four phases. The first, origins (from 1970s to 1988), occurred in western cultures in Scandinavia, notably through the work of Dan Olweus, including the beginning of measurement techniques and intervention procedures; however, separate origins in eastern cultures such as Japan should be noted. The second (1989–mid-1990s) involved the spread of these ideas to many other countries, and a bringing together of western and eastern studies into one international endeavor. The third (1990s–2004), saw a well-established international research program on bullying which by now commanded considerable attention in academic circles and which had resulted in many publications, but also resources for anti-bullying programs, which have been shown to have some degree of success (Ttofi and Farrington 2011).

The fourth phase has been the advent of cyberbullying. This will have been present more or less since mobile phones and the Internet were invented; but the spread of these devices and the awareness of cyberbullying have happened this century. Press reports and academic publications on cyberbullying took off rapidly from around 2004. This has had ramifications for both academic research and for anti-bullying practice.

So far as academic research is concerned, cyberbullying has both revitalized the bullying research program and challenged it. It has revitalized it in part by bringing in a new mix of disciplines and researchers, from for example, media, communication, and legal studies, to complement the work of (mainly) psychologists and (sometimes) sociologists up to that time. Publications on cyberbullying have rocketed in the past decade as this influx of research and researchers has borne fruit. It has also challenged the research program in several ways. One is definitional—can

we apply the usual criteria for school bullying, namely repetition and imbalance of power, to the cyber domain? Another is in terms of scope. The school bullying research stuck rather narrowly to peer–peer bullying in school (with, for example, workplace bullying as a largely separate research area). Such a narrow focus is difficult to sustain when studying cyberbullying, much of which is instigated outside school, and a great deal of which may involve adults as well as children or young people as victims or perpetrators. There are also challenges for practitioners, and for academics seeking to make their research relevant, to ensure that useful resources for coping with cyberbullying become available and disseminated.

The available research on school bullying, including findings from regular surveys such as Health Behavior of School-Aged Children (HBSC), indicate that rates have been in decline in a majority of countries surveyed, over the past 10–15 years. It is plausible that the school bullying research program and its practical applications has been a major contributor to this. But the evidence regarding cyberbullying, although much more limited, does not show any clear decrease and indeed sometimes shows an increase in recent years. Developing awareness and resources to cope with cyberbullying is a work in progress. It may be a work in progress for some time, as modes of use of mobile phones and the Internet change rapidly and is measured in years rather than decades.

This book brings together contributions from seven countries across the globe, to focus on a range of issues around cyberbullying. It includes issues around family and gender; research perspectives from different countries; and practical contributions on prevention and intervention. The authors are experts in their respective areas, and this will surely be a most useful book for researchers and practitioners concerned about understanding cyberbullying and ameliorating or preventing the negative and sometimes devastating consequences it can have.

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