

Cyberbullying and Electronic Stalking

Cyberbullying and Electronic Stalking: The Ins and Outs of these Offenses on the Rise

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Cyberbullying

Definition

Cyberbullying is defined as “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

(STOP cyberbullying) Although there is a range of ages that can be affected by this, this problem is most prevalent at the junior high/middle school stage. (Qing 2007)

Cyberbullying is unrelated to adult cyber-harassment and its methods are limited only to the imagination of the child and their access to technology. (STOP cyberbullying)

Anybody can be a victim or a perpetrator of cyberbullying, but studies have shown that 60% of cyber victims are females, and 52% of cyber bullies are male. (Qing 2007)

Types

The two types of cyberbullying are direct attacks and by proxy. Direct attacks are messages sent directly to a child. Examples of direct attacks are: instant messaging/text messaging harassment, stealing passwords, blogs, web sites, sending pictures through e-mail and cell phones, and impersonation. (STOP cyberbullying) Cyberbullying by proxy is when a cyber bully uses someone else to do their “dirty” work. These people are usually unaware that they are being used as an accomplice to cyberbullying. This type of cyberbullying is the most dangerous kind because adults often get involved and they don’t know they are interacting with a child or someone they know. (STOP cyberbullying) An example of this is getting the ISP or service provider involved without

knowing it. Kids will click the warn button on their IM screen which if done enough times can cause the victim to lose their account. By clicking the warn button it notifies the ISP that the user is violating their rules. Although service providers are aware of this abuse and check for verification, all the cyber bully needs to do is make the victim angry enough to say one wrong thing and makes the victim look like they are at fault. (STOP cyberbullying) The table below has been taken from a study done by the University of Calgary located in Canada. This table illustrates the gender differences in playing the victim and bully roles. (Qing 2007) It has been edited from its original version.

	Gender	
	(%)	
	M	F
Cyberbully victim (<i>n</i> = 44)	38.6	59.1
Cyberbully (<i>n</i> = 23)	52.2	43.5

Causes and Prevention

There is not one cause to cyberbullying. Kids are motivated by many things such as anger, revenge, frustration, entertainment or even by accident. Since there is not one cause to cyberbullying, there isn't just one solution to the problem. For example, if a child is a victim to an angry cyberbully the best way to help stop the problem is to give the angry cyberbully an avenue to express him/herself. The more official an avenue is for the cyberbully, the easier it will be for them to release their anger without hurting other people. (STOP cyberbullying) Because there is not one cause and not one solution to cyberbullying, it is hard to find a solid formula for prevention. The best thing to do is educate children about the consequences of cyberbullying and teach them respect for others and to take a stand against all types of bullying. (STOP cyberbullying) If cyberbullying is already happening, kids should turn to adults to report what is happening. The negative effect of this is that 67.1% of children felt adults helped when being informed of the problem. (Qing 2007) Although some children do report cyberbullying when it happens, it has been shown that only 34.7% of kids actually reported the incident to an adult.

Conclusion

The scope of cyberbullying is affecting more adolescents than people are aware of. In the same study as mentioned above, (University of Calgary) it was shown that over half the students knew someone that had been cyberbullied. This is an indication that

cyberbullying is on the rise and becoming an increasingly critical issue of concern. (Qing 2007) With this problem on the rise, it is hoped that we can find more ways to help prevent cyberbullying and also have a more stable foundation of consequences.

Electronic Stalking

Definition

Electronic Stalking, also known as Cyberstalking, an extension of the physical form of stalking, is where the electronic mediums such as the Internet are used to pursue, harass or contact another in an unsolicited fashion. (Petherick 2007) Usually, because of the broad area where the internet is available this form of stalking will never turn into the physical kind. However, that does not make it any less painful and is still a crime. (Petherick 2007) Although physical stalking has been around for centuries, statutes have only recognized it in recent decades. Due to that, electronic stalking could be called a crime of the nineties because of its reliance on computer and communications technology which have really only become prevalent in the past decade. (Petherick 2007)

The Law

We have already defined electronic stalking as an extension of physical stalking. Computer crime expert Eoghan Casey says that incidences using a purely electronic medium are rare. The kind of stalking, the extension of the physical kind, is known as *modus operandi* (method of operation). Because electronic stalking is an extension of the

physical sense, states have dealt with offenders by using their respective stalking laws that are already in place. (Petherick 2007) An example of a statute that is broad enough to include electronic stalking is the one used right here in Michigan. In 1994 a man was on trial for stalking a woman through her email and answering machine. This case also shows how electronic stalking is an extension of physical stalking since their relationship involved a few physical dates. Although all 50 states have enacted stalking statutes, Michigan's statute is the only one that includes the electronic type of stalking. (Lewis 1994) Michigan's statute states that a victim need only feel threatened or harassed by repeated contacts, physical or electronic. (Lewis 1994) Although Michigan is the only state that has a broad enough statute to include electronic stalking, the concern of it is getting to the federal level. A federal bill was introduced to broaden existing laws to include telephone, email, and other form of electronic communication. (Lewis 1994)

Types

There is not one type of person that is an electronic stalker. The three most common distinctions of typologies are people with a prior relationship with the victim, people without a prior relationship, and those motivated by a disorder called erotomania. Erotomania is when someone possesses the delusion that the target of the behavior is in love with them. Two broad categories of stalkers are Psychopathic Personality Stalkers and Psychotic Personality Stalkers. The table below illustrates characteristics of both types. (Petherick 2007)

Psychopathic Personality Stalker Psychotic Personality Stalker

Generally male	May be male or female
Absence of mental disorder	Delusions or delusional fixation
Targets familiar victims	Usually targets strangers
Harassment may be anonymous	Attempt to contact the victim
Usually some precipitating stressor	Absence of precipitating

Both of these categories are a broad explanation of electronic stalkers. The Psychotic Personality Stalker refers to a disorder and because of that the stalker may not even be aware of their actions. (Petherick 2007) Another interesting statistic on electronic stalkers is that they tend to have a higher educational background than other offenders. Those numbers being 42% having finished some high school, 22% graduating high school, and 6% having graduated college. (Petherick 2007) The ethnicity of offenders also shows that the population that are electronic stalkers are mostly non-white. Those numbers being 52% black, 25% hispanic, 9% unknown, and 0.4% oriental. (Petherick 2007) As you can see, there are many characteristics that go into the making of an electronic stalker. There is not one main group of people where electronic stalking is common. Sometimes it is a disorder, usually they are educated, and their ethnicity is usually in the minority. All of these factors jumbled together doesn't make for definite type that is an electronic stalker.

Prevalence

It is hard to come up with an exact accurate number of how often within a population electronic stalking occurs. One method to estimate its prevalence is to examine the disorder types in a clinic study. This however presents a problem because some stalkers may not even be aware of their disorder and therefore never seek treatment. However, it has been estimated that at least 20,000 Americans are being stalked at the moment. (Petherick 2007) It has been further estimated to suggest that as many as one in 20 adults will be stalked in their lifetime and that up to 200,000 exhibit a stalkers' traits. (Petherick 2007) Also, it has been estimated that 20% of stalker cases involve an electronic medium which suggests this offense is on the rise and that electronic devices have given a fresh avenue for stalkers to use. (Lewis 1994) One method that stalkers have been shown to use is to place tiny electronic devices in women's suitcases, backpacks or car trunks and watch their whereabouts with a computer. (Nash 2000) This method of stalking again shows how electronic stalking is most commonly an extension of physical stalking. The stalker had to have had some physical interaction with the victim, or at least was near enough to them to put the electronic device into their bags or trunk.

Prevention

There are some tactics that can help a person lessen the chance that they will be electronically stalked, such as keeping their identity private on the electronic avenues they use. These avenues include email, profiles, and headers. (Petherick 2007) A good

way to keep yourself from being a stalker victim through your email is to create a gender neutral account. Most victims are female so if you have a gender neutral address stalkers won't be able to tell if you are male or female. Also, sexually provocative addresses should be avoided because that can only goad a stalker if you are targeted. When it comes to profiles, remove any personally identifying information about yourself. This gives you greater control over what kind of information to give out and to whom. (Petherick 2007)

Headers contain identifying information when email is sent such as email address and name. Some people are not even aware this feature is activated, but they also have the option to turn it off. (Petherick 2007) Also, there are some things people can do who have found themselves in a situation where they believe they are being electronically stalked. The most important thing to do if you become aware that you are a target of an electronic stalker is to document everything. You should keep a hard copy and a copy on your computer of any emails, and document time and length of phone calls or any other written communication. (Petherick 2007) It is also important to watch out for your own safety. Even if law officials are involved, a target must be aware of the information they give out to other people of their whereabouts. (Petherick 2007) If the electronic stalking persists, than a victim may go as far as to issue a Personal Protection Order. This is done through the court. Victims need to be careful however because sometimes this only angers the stalker. (Petherick 2007)

Conclusion

Electronic Stalking has been shown to be a crime that the law is fairly new on. States have been trying to get a grasp on it since it has only become prevalent in the past decade. The federal government is also making an attempt to step in and regulate this behavior. There are many different types of electronic stalkers. Nothing is definite and with 20,000 Americans being stalked at this moment no one can be too safe. Although there are forms of prevention, sometimes those don't work. If a person finds themselves as a target of an electronic stalker they should make sure to document everything and take the proper legal action to protect themselves.

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STOP cyberbullying <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html>