

Cyberbullying

Coping with Negative and Enhancing Positive Uses of New Technologies, in Relationships in Educational Settings

COST ACTION IS0801

ANN FRISÉN

The main aim of the Action is to share expertise on cyberbullying in educational settings, coping with negative and enhancing positive uses of new technologies in the relationships area, moving towards a common set of guidelines applicable in Europe. The main objectives of COST IS0801 are:

1. Sharing of developing expertise in knowledge base and measurement techniques across researchers (comparisons of the nature of cyberbullying across different countries; measurement instruments for different purposes; linguistic issues in translation)
2. Sharing of input from outside the research community; specifically, from legal experts (e.g. on rights regarding privacy, anonymity, defamation etc on the internet); and from mobile phone companies and internet service providers (on present and feasible actions, new technological developments, etc).
3. Sharing of already nationally published guidelines, and recommended coping strategies, in different countries, including positive uses of new technologies in the relationships area; moving towards a common set of guidelines applicable for the European Community.
4. Increased awareness of the issue, and of the outcomes of the Action, to likely beneficiaries of the Action.

Participant Countries

There are 28 participating COST countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and United Kingdom. Two NON-COST countries: Australia, Ukraine.

Working Groups

WG1: Sharing of developing expertise in knowledge base and measurement techniques across researchers, organisation the workshop.

WG2: Sharing of input from outside the research community; specifically, from legal experts and from mobile phone companies and internet service providers.

WG3: Sharing of already nationally published guidelines, and recommended coping strategies, in different countries, including positive uses of new technologies in the relationships area.

WG4: Actively initiate and organise short exchanges, co-supervision of students, and any additional small workshops or meetings that may be necessary.

WG5: Sharing of research on coping strategies, in different countries, and of research that will inform the work on guidelines carried out by Working Group 3.

WG6: Positive uses of new technologies, in relationships in educational settings.

Timetable and Management

The Action formally started on October 22nd 2008, and lasts for 4 years. Professor Peter K Smith, Goldsmiths, University of London, is chair of the Action. The activities of the Action are organised by a Management Committee and Core Group. Major means of achieving the objectives of the Action is via the Workshops and a final dissemination conference in the summer 2012.

What is ‘Cyberbullying’?

Cyberbullying is an important phenomenon which has added a new dimension to the area of bullying, harassment and abusive relationships. Over the last 20 years there has been considerable research and focus on school bullying, as well as increasing institutional actions and requirements to limit such acts. The potential for cyberbullying has grown with the increasing penetration of networked computers, mobile phones and virtual social networks Cyberbullying has distinctive features, both in the way it is carried out and the kinds of impact it has. Effective ways of dealing with cyberbullying require not only some traditional methods, but also innovative approaches, including positive uses of the new technologies themselves.

Bullying is usually defined as being an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. The repetition and imbalance of power criteria demarcate bullying as a subset of wider aggressive behaviour. Bullying and harassment is widely recognised as a significant problem in schools. It has serious negative impacts on the health and well-being of victims; in extreme cases it can lead to suicides. The perpetrators of bullying are starting on what may be a long-term career of antisocial behaviour. The bystanders, and the school generally, suffer from poor morale and worsened school climate, when bullying behaviours are frequent and not dealt with effectively. Most European countries now are aware of this issue, and have taken some steps to prevent school bullying; there has been considerable

international cooperation, and a number of well-publicised intervention campaigns, that have had some success.

Since around 2000, reports of cyberbullying have appeared in the media. Initially these just involved nasty, abusive or threatening text messages on mobile phones, or emails, but in the space of a few years have spread to instant messaging, chat rooms, websites and other forms, as mobile phone and internet technology has developed and as our awareness of these abuses increases. One corresponding definition of cyberbullying is: an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. Although cyber-bullying may be a single individual act (e.g. sending a threatening text), this can be circulated widely or copied by others (repetition). Some research argues that the technology may increase the likelihood for deviant behaviour because people can remain anonymous; supervision is lacking on the Internet, as there are ineffective formal and informal control mechanisms; mobile phone technology in particular can cause an individual to become a perpetual target; power differences between bully and target in relation to Internet knowledge may promote cyber-bullying.

