Cyberbullying in the UK: an evaluation of some intervention procedures

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In England, a number of anti-bullying intervention schemes have been promoted over the last 20 years (Samara & Smith, 2008). These have had the aim of changing attitudes, helping victims and reducing the frequency of bullying behaviour. With the advent of cyberbullying especially in the last decade, some specific interventions have been devised to tackle this new form of bullying. These interventions have seldom been rigorously evaluated. Here we summarise findings from evaluations of four such interventions. Two are video films for curriculum use, one generally on cyberbullying and one on "sexting". A third is an online cybermentors programme using trained pupil volunteers. The last is the Safer Schools Partnership involving the police. The findings will be presented and the implications discussed.

Background
Research is showing that as traditional bullying decreases, levels of cyberbullying remain unaltered or may be increasing (Rivers & Noret, 2010; Rigby & Smith, 2011). An earlier suite of materials entitled Safe to Learn, produced between 2007 and 2009 by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), included extensive material on cyberbullying; however this has now been archived, and the new Department for Education (DfE) has a much more concise set of advice for schools concerning anti-bullying measures. Amongst other aspects, this new DfE guidance (DfE, 2011) clearly extends the school responsibility for dealing with bullying outside the school premises; this is particularly relevant for cyberbullying, which predominantly takes place outside of school, although the ‘fallout’ is often brought into school. There is also a new Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) framework which includes assessment of strategies used for dealing with bullying (including cyberbullying) in the schools inspection (Ofsted, 2012).

Although methods of dealing with traditional bullying may often be helpful for cyberbullying (particularly as the same children are often involved), it is also important to develop different interventions to prevent and respond to cyberbullying. These include updating anti-bullying
policies to include cyberbullying; Acceptable Use Policies for the internet; e-safety training for staff, pupils, peer supporters and parents; and using police officers to ‘lay down the law’ about the legality and illegality of online bullying. Unlike some forms of bullying, cyberbullying produces evidence (texts; videos; images) which can be used to respond to an incident, identifying what happened and who was involved. However, when the sender is anonymous (e.g. Formspring; Little Gossip), it can be the most difficult kind of bullying to tackle.

Since 2000, when cyberbullying began to be researched more systematically, there has been a growth in organisations and initiatives to tackle it. Organisations that produce resources for schools for e-safety and cyberbullying in the U.K. include the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP); Childnet International; Beatbullying (an anti-bullying charity) and the Safer Schools Partnership (with the police force). It is these four interventions that were evaluated as part of a DAPHNE III project on interventions for cyberbullying in adolescence (http://bullyingandcyber.koinema.com/en/).

**The four interventions schemes selected for evaluation**

Two e-safety films were evaluated by students for their impact in preventing cyberbullying. These were

1. Childnet International’s *Lets Fight It Together* about cyberbullying for 11-14-year olds, and
2. Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre’s (CEOP) Exposed about sexting for 14-16 year olds. Sexting is the act of sending of sexually explicit images or texts using mobile phones.

In addition two further interventions were evaluated:

3. Beatbullying’s CyberMentors scheme, which was originally designed to support young people involved in cyberbullying although it now has a more general remit. This was evaluated for its effectiveness by the cybermentors and cybermentees.
4. The Safer Schools Partnership, a scheme in which police officers were placed in secondary schools for an allotted time each week. This scheme was evaluated by school staff for it’s effectiveness in both preventing and responding to cyberbullying.
The DAPHNE III interventions for cyberbullying questionnaire

A school questionnaire with a range of strategies including the four specific interventions was used to contextualise and inform our evaluations. Questionnaires were sent to six hundred schools with a 10% return rate (62 schools). We asked schools if they knew of the four organisations or schemes and if they had used them. For online resources provided by CEOP and Childnet, schools were asked to rate how easy it was to navigate the websites and access and use the resources. For the Beatbullying CyberMentor scheme, schools were asked if the cybermentors had been trained to help and advise on e-safety and cyberbullying; if they supported and provided guidance for cyberbullied students and to rate how effective this was. Questions about the Safer Schools Partnership included access to a police officer; how effective they were in supporting schools in tackling cyberbullying. These more general findings are included in the next four sections, which summarise the evaluations. The implications of the findings are discussed at the end of the chapter.

The evaluation of Let’s Fight It Together, a film from Childnet International

(https://childnet-int.org/kia/)

Childnet International is a non-profit organisation working with others (parents, teachers, organisations) to help children and young people use the internet constructively, acquire new “net literacy” skills and protect children from being exploited in the online environments provided by new technologies. They provide one-day e-safety workshops in schools and films, resources and lesson plans, which can be downloaded from their KnowITall website. Resources can be used in lessons or for whole-school assemblies. They also provide online questionnaires to evaluate their resources. As part of the DAPHNE III project an evaluation of Childnet’s e-safety film Let’s Fight it Together was conducted. Only half of the schools completing the DAPHNE III questionnaire had heard of Childnet International and of those, only 18% used their resources. All that did found the website and resources easy to access and use. The majority thought their students found the Childnet resources either helpful or very helpful.

A previous evaluation of Childnet’s resources carried out 2004, in conjunction with Lancashire Constabulary, was conducted in 12 schools over a six week period (Childnet International, 2005). The study focused on the film “Jenny’s story” and the associated teaching resources; it sought to ascertain whether the film would make an impact on student’s online behaviour, through giving them a realistic example of the consequences of
giving out personal information. The findings indicated that as a result of the film 72% of students changed their view about introducing an unknown person to a friend on the internet. In addition, there was a significant impact on behaviour and attitudes after viewing the film; this was demonstrated in the decrease from 18% to 3% of students who said they would share personal details with people they had not met face to face.

This current evaluation focuses on the *Let’s Fight It Together* film “*Joe’s Story*”. Through the use of the victims’ video diary, this film shows how an incident that occurred during a lesson escalates into cyberbullying. The film demonstrates the impact of the behaviour of others on the victim, but also how young people can be drawn into carrying out the cyberbullying behaviours. Finally through the use of the video diary the boy’s mother is made aware of what is going on and takes decisive action. The film ends with the arrival of the police.

We also sought to evaluate the film from the students’ perspective, overall and six different aspects of the film. Another aim of our evaluation was to assess the impact this short film would have on students coping strategies. Students were asked to provide information of coping strategies employed to deal with cyberbullying, both pre and post film. The impact of the film was measured by any changes in coping strategies used before and after the film. They answered two questions at each time point, once for if they were to be cyberbullied themselves, and again if someone they know were to be cyberbullied. Previous research among adolescents has indicated that if a young person is the victim of cyberbullying they employ a number of strategies to deal with the problem, these strategies range from blocking the aggressor, asking them to stop or some have reported stopping using the website or form (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Data was collected during the winter school term 2011. Students were asked to complete anonymous pre and post film questionnaires, which were administered as part of a PSHE lesson on average a week apart. The focus of the study was on students in KS3 (Key Stage 3: 11 – 14 years old). We report findings from students in 3 secondary schools in southeast England; 383 students (296 male, 86 female) completed a pre-film questionnaire, and 390 students (287 male, 97 female) completed a post-film questionnaire.
Prior to being shown the film, students were asked to give a definition of cyberbullying; we found that 92% were able to give a valid definition of what constituted cyberbullying. Students were also asked if they had experienced any form of cyberbullying; 52 students (28 male, 24 female) reported being a victim of cyberbullying, of whom 37 (15 male, 22 female) reported knowing who was cyberbullying them. When asked if they knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 99 students (64 male, 35 female) said that they did.

**Ratings for the film**

After seeing the film, students were asked to rate the film *Let’s Fight It Together* on a scale of 1 – 5 (1=very poor, 2= poor, 3= satisfactory, 4=good, 5=very good). No students gave low ratings; 11% of students rated it as satisfactory, 54% as good, and 33% as very good. Students were also asked to rate the following aspects: the story; the characters; the music; the length of the film; the ending and holding your attention. Overall the students rated all the aspects of the film as good, with music and holding your attention rated as very good.

**Coping strategies**

We asked students about their own coping strategies for cyberbullying, both before and after seeing the film. Students were presented with a list of strategies and asked to indicate “what would you do if someone cyberbullied you?” Before the film, the most common strategy was to tell a parent or carer (79%) and tell a friend (64%), then tell a teacher (57%); report cyberbullying to the police in school (19%); the least common strategy was do nothing (5%). After the film, the most common response was still tell a parent or carer (79%) and tell a friend (62%), then tell a teacher (60%), report cyberbullying to the police in school (24%); the least common strategy was still do nothing (5%). Although there were slight increases in the percentages of students who would tell a teacher, or report cyberbullying to the police, after the film, neither this nor any other changes in coping strategies was statistically significant.

Students were then presented with the same list of strategies including telling a friend; telling a parent/carer; telling a teacher; reporting to the police; reporting to the website; confronting the person responsible or doing nothing. They were asked to indicate “what would you do if someone cyberbullied someone you know?” Before the film, the most common strategy was tell a teacher (65%), then tell a parent or carer (58%), tell a friend (42%) and confront the person (41%); the least common strategy was do nothing (4%). After the film, the most
common strategy was still to tell a parent or carer (69%), tell a teacher (61%), confront the person responsible (46%) and tell a friend (43%); the least common strategy was still do nothing (3%). Again despite some small changes, these were not statistically significant.

**Summary**  
This study indicates that before the film, the great majority of students were able to provide a valid definition of what constituted cyberbullying. On seeing the film, the majority of students felt the film was good overall, with no-one rating it as poor. Nevertheless it would appear that seeing the film had little impact on the strategies students would use themselves to deal with cyberbullying, or if a friend was being cyberbullied. The most common strategies reported both before and after the film were: tell a parent, tell a friend and tell a teacher, with do nothing as the least common strategy reported. These did not change significantly after the film. There is conceivably some ceiling effect here, as even before the film, the majority say that they would tell someone, and very few would do nothing.

**The evaluation of Exposed, a film from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) (www.thinkuknow.co.uk)**

CEOP was founded in 2006 and is affiliated to the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and is partly funded by the European Commission. Although CEOP is tasked with tackling online sex offenders, CEOP Education has produced resources and training in child protection and e-safety that have become very popular in schools from all sectors. Schools are not permitted to use the CEOP resources until trained at a half-day, free training session. Once trained, teachers can access a range of resources for all age groups, including films and lesson plans. Resources can be used in lessons or for whole-school assemblies. CEOP regularly evaluate their resources through their own online questionnaires completed by staff and students. Davidson, Martellozzo and Lorenz (2009) evaluated the CEOP ThinkUKnow (TUK) internet safety programme, and recommended a series of changes including ongoing review and monitoring of training; regular evaluation of their resources to ensure quality control; improvement and updating of the website; increased engagement with parents/carers; the use of more realistic scenarios for films; targeting girls’ risk-taking behaviours on social networking sites and providing ongoing support and training for trainers.

Of the schools responding to the DAPHNE III questionnaire, three quarters used the CEOP website and resources, most finding them very easy to access and use. The CEOP training for
teachers and the impact of the resources on the students were thought to be either ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’. A quote from an Assistant Headteacher sums up the problems faced by schools by an increase in cyberbullying, including sexting:

‘Cyberbullying is the number one form of bullying in our school. Also on the up are girls sending naked/semi-naked images via mobile and these going global. It’s incredibly distressing. One girl involved was just eleven years old, so images are now subject to ‘child porn’ investigation - so sad’.

The film Exposed was developed in response to a report on sexting by Phippen (2009). The report found that sexting was prevalent among young people, who had a very different attitude from adults on what constituted an inappropriate image. Images also reached a far larger audience than the intended recipient. However, it was only a minority of young people who knew someone who had been adversely affected by sexting and thought young people needed more support and advice. If affected by sexting, the majority would turn to their friends and only a small number would turn to a teacher.

Exposed is an eight minute film, which shows how a girl, Dee, carried away by the excitement of a new relationship, sends her boyfriend, Si, some explicit photographs. Si forwards these on to his friend Jay who uploads the images to a specially constructed site. The images are seen by other students at Dee’s school and she is both directly bullied and cyberbullied. She confronts her boyfriend and discovers what happens. She runs away and she spends the night in a café. The film ends with the girl going home and the actor playing Dee talks through a range of strategies to help young people if they find themselves in that situation, including reporting to CEOP. CEOP has a ‘report abuse’ button on many websites used by young people, including schools. If clicked, this opens a referral pathway leading to support and the police depending on the seriousness of the incident.

Before the four schools that had agreed to evaluate Exposed could show the film, they had to be trained. A CEOP half-day session was organised for twenty trainees, including staff from the four schools. Trainees were a mixture of teachers, Child Protection Officers; police and the local authority anti-bullying staff and e-safety team. Training consisted of a PowerPoint presentation about child protection; identifying online issues and tackling cyberbullying using the CEOP resources. The training was evaluated using pre and post-training questionnaires. Trainees were asked about the quality and the delivery of the session and if
they felt more confident with recognising online issues; cyberbullying and child protection issues before and after the training. Trainees reported feeling significantly more confident in recognising online and cyberbullying issues after the training. Trainee levels of confidence in recognising child protection issues remained unchanged due to their already high level of expertise in child protection.

In order to carry out our evaluation of the film, teachers were asked to show the film to their students in a Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education lesson. A pre-film questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the lesson. The film was shown and teachers used the CEOP resources for the remainder of the lesson. The post-film questionnaire was handed out at another lesson at least a week later.

The evaluation was designed to measure (i) what they thought of the film, and (ii) the impact of the film on the students’ behaviour (i.e. coping strategies if involved in, or witnessing someone they knew involved in, a sexting incident). The pre-film questionnaire asked all students to define sexting. Those students who had experienced a sexting incident or those who had witnessed a sexting incident were asked to complete a series of questions about the incident i.e. what happened, who was involved and the coping strategies used. There were two further questions asking all students to identify which coping strategies they would use in future if they were involved in a sexting incident themselves, and then if they witnessed a sexting incident involving somebody they knew. Students were asked to choose from a list of coping strategies including telling a friend; telling a parent/carer; telling a teacher; reporting to the police; reporting to the website; confronting the person responsible or doing nothing.

The post-film questionnaire asked the students to give an overall rating for the film and rate the story, characters, music, length of the film, the ending and if it held their attention. Ratings were measured on a 1-5 scale (1=very poor, 2= poor, 3= satisfactory, 4=good, 5=very good). They were also asked to identify the main points in the film. The questions on coping strategies were repeated at the end. The impact of the film was measured by any changes in coping strategies used before and after the film.

1,135 students aged between 13 -16 years, from four schools, completed pre and post-film questionnaires. Despite schools being asked to leave a gap of at least a week between the first
and second questionnaire, the majority of students (75%) completed both questionnaires on the same day. The gender balance was good (49% boys; 51% girls) and most students were aged between 13-15 years (92%) with a smaller group of older 15-16 year olds (8%).

Half the students defined sexting correctly with significantly more girls than boys giving the correct definition. Also, confidence in defining sexting developed with age as fewer of the younger year groups knew what it was. Altogether 260 students (23%) had witnessed a sexting incident. 40 students (4%) had been involved in sexting incidents; of these, there were more girls (68%) than boys (32%). Of the 40, 26 students were 14-15 years old; 11 were 13-14 years old and 3 were 15-16 years old. The information provided by those involved in a sexting incident and those witnessing a sexting incident corresponded reasonably well. Most images were circulated by text, with some posted on Facebook, although more victims of sexting had images uploaded onto MSN and more witnesses saw sexting through Blackberry Messenger. An example given by one 16 year-old girl involved in a sexting incident was:

“A person sent me a graphic image, I sent one back. They put it on a leaflet and posted it indoors/on lockers, so I showed people the image he sent me. Payback”.

Both victims and witnesses said the perpetrator was known to the victim, who was described as either a ‘friend’ or ‘ex-boy/girlfriend’. Most images were described as reaching a wide audience (everybody; friends of friends; group of friends), although some people involved in sexting reported only one person had seen the image. In 60% of cases the image was removed but there was a wide time range from hours to months. Some did not know. One 14-year old girl involved in a sexting incident summed up the problem with removal:

“It was hard to delete it off people's phones”.

When asked what they did about the sexting incident, both those involved and those witnessing an incident reported telling a friend, and doing nothing, as the most common strategies, with some victims confronting the person responsible or reporting it to the website. However, some witnesses said those involved in sexting had told a teacher, or reported it to the police, whereas none of them had actually done so themselves.
**Ratings for the film**

All students thought the film satisfactory to good (mean rating: 3.72 out of 5). There were no age differences in the overall rating for the film and ratings for the length of the film; characters; story and music. However, younger students rated the ending and the film’s ability to hold their attention significantly higher than the older year groups. Girls’ ratings were significantly higher than boys on all aspects of the film, as were the ratings of those involved in a sexting incident. A 15 year old girl commented on the film:

“Reminds me of the pressure I get from boys asking for pictures, but gives me the confidence to say no because I’ve seen the consequences”

**Coping strategies**

Before the film, students were asked what they would do if in future someone posted a personal picture of a sexual nature or circulated messages of a sexual nature about them without asking permission. Over half said they would confront the person responsible (53%); tell a friend (51%), with just under half telling a parent/carer (48%); do nothing (5%) was the least common. After the film, students were asked the same question. Over half would still confront the person responsible (54%); tell a friend (52%) and tell a parent/carer (51%) and do nothing (3%) remained the least common. However percentages for some strategies showed an increase, in particular reporting to the website (from 39% to 49%); reporting to the police officer in school (from 30% to 38%); and telling a teacher (from 22% to 30%).

Before the film, students were also asked what they would do if in future someone posted a personal picture of a sexual nature or circulated messages of a sexual nature about someone they knew without asking permission. The most common response (but less than half) said they would confront the person responsible (44%); tell a friend (42%), with about a third selecting reporting it to the website (34%); do nothing (8%) was again the least selected. After the film, students were asked the same question. There was little change in the most commonly used strategies, and do nothing (5%) remained the least popular. However reporting to the website rose (from 34% to 42%), as did telling a teacher (from 26% to 35%) and reporting to the police officer in school (from 28% to 36%).

**Summary**

This evaluation found that only half the students participating actually knew what sexting was and these were mostly girls and older students. It was most common amongst 14-15 year
olds. Although sexting was only experienced directly by a small minority of students, nearly a quarter had witnessed an incident. Most sexting images were distributed to a wide audience by text, with some images and text uploaded to Facebook, MSN and Blackberry Messenger. Images and text could take weeks to be removed. The person responsible for sexting was usually a friend or ex-boy/girlfriend. As in the previous study by Phippen (2009), we found that those involved in a sexting incident usually told a friend rather than an adult.

The ratings for the film were high with girls, younger students and those involved in sexting incidents in the past, who gave the film its highest ratings. However, the film appeared to have relatively little impact on the coping strategies of the majority of students. When asked what they would do if they were involved in a sexting incident or knew someone who was involved in a sexting incident in future, the two most popular strategies for both were to confront the person responsible and tell a friend. However, students would also tell a parent if they themselves were involved in a sexting incident, and report it to the website if somebody they knew was involved. As doing nothing was the least popular strategy, at least it shows that the majority of students consider themselves proactive in coping, unlike those who had actually been involved in sexting for whom doing nothing was the most common strategy after telling a friend.

**Beatbullying CyberMentors and cyberbullying** ([https://cybermentors.org.uk/](https://cybermentors.org.uk/))

Beatbullying registered as a charity in 2002 and is now one of the leading anti-bullying charities in the UK. The central feature of Beatbullying is a peer mentoring programme which gives training in listening, mentoring and CyberMentoring. CyberMentors are a new form of virtual peer support. Students, usually recruited in schools, are trained by Beatbullying staff in 2-day training workshops based in schools or in workshops organised by local authorities. CyberMentors mentor online in and out of school; have an online identity and are protected from abuse by a software filter called netmod. They are supported through the CyberMentors website by a referral team of senior cybermentors and counsellors. The scheme was evaluated by Banerjee, Robinson and Smalley (2010) who found that Beatbullying mentors reduced bullying in five intervention schools. Beatbullying’s training was highly regarded and the CyberMentors were found to raise awareness of bullying and cyberbullying in schools and be particularly effective at transition for younger students. The understanding of what bullying is and reporting bullying had increased in the student population. Students using the scheme found the CyberMentors easy to contact and helpful to
an extent. However, schools varied in their promotion of the schemes and the supervision of mentors; not all school staff were engaged and the scheme needed ongoing monitoring. This was a useful evaluation, but the scheme has developed substantially since then, so a further evaluation, assessing direct experiences of cyber mentors and cybermentees, was thought to be valuable.

The DAPHNE III questionnaire showed that over half of the schools responding had heard of the CyberMentors scheme, but only 14% had actually used it. Of those that used it, most reported that their CyberMentors had been trained to advise and provide support and advice on e-safety and cyberbullying to mentees. The majority thought the CyberMentors were very effective in promoting e-safety and dealing with cyberbullying.

In order to carry out our investigation, two online questionnaires for cybermentors and cybermentees were devised to evaluate mentoring sessions, using the CyberMentor website. Both mentors and mentees were asked to provide information about any cyberbullying incidents they had been involved in, the former from the perspective of a peer supporter, the latter, as a victim. Questions included what happened, the identity of the perpetrators (including age and gender), the means used to cyberbully, the duration of the cyberbullying and the coping strategies used by the victims. CyberMentors were asked about the advice and support they gave the mentees and if they knew if the cyberbullying had stopped. They were asked to evaluate their training, referral procedures and the levels of support provided by Beatbullying staff. Cybermentees evaluated the helpfulness of the cybermentor’s advice and support and how they coped with the cyberbullying; and if they would use the scheme again and advise others to do so.

**Findings: CyberMentor questionnaire**

74 online questionnaires were completed by both cybermentors (56) and senior CyberMentors (16). The majority were female (86%); ages ranged from 11-25 years (mean age = 15 years) and they spent between 1-5 hrs online mentoring on average four mentees a week. Most had been trained in the last year with a quarter trained in the last two to three years, with the vast majority (97%) thinking the Beatbullying training had prepared them well. Over half the cybermentors spent more than the recommended ten minutes with their mentees and 42% had mentored young people who had been cyberbullied.
42% of the cyberbullying incidents reported by the CyberMentors lasted a few weeks; most involved Facebook; over half were considered average with a third considered more serious than usual or very serious. Only a few cybermentors (21%) knew if the bullying had stopped completely, two thirds did not know. The CyberMentors were asked to report the coping strategies of their cyberbullied mentees who had either told a teacher (45%); a friend (39%) or a parent/carer (39%). Few mentees had involved the police (3%) and confronted the person responsible (6%).

The CyberMentors found the website easy (39%) or very easy (54%) to use and most felt very safe (77%) and well supported (87%) by Beatbullying. As one cybermentor aged 15 years commented:

“You feel that you can help people out and this will make a big difference to their lives, no matter how big or small their problem was”

Criticisms of the scheme were in the minority but a 13 year old CyberMentor commented:

“Some of my fellow CyberMentors, who I know in person, stopped going on the site because they simply don’t know how to handle situations that can’t be covered with ‘tell someone’. I think maybe if we had training in what to do if you can’t just say ‘tell someone’, they might have been happier and stayed”.

Findings: Cybermentee questionnaire

106 online questionnaires were completed by cybermentees, most of whom (90%) were female. Ages of mentees ranged from 9-18 years but most were 15 years and under. The majority found it easy (44%) or very easy (44%) to contact a cybermentor and over two-thirds found it easy (34%) or very easy (35%) to talk to a cybermentor. 44% spent longer than 10 minutes talking to a mentor.

42 cybermentees had been cyberbullied; most of these (83%) were aged 11-16 years. All but one were female. They considered most incidents either more serious than usual (39%) or very serious (36%). They said that most incidents lasted a few weeks (28%) to more than a month (57%) and over half the incidents involved Facebook. Two thirds of incidents involved four people or less, aged between 9-16 years, with a third involving between ten or more people. One incident involved around forty people. Most of those involved were about the same age as the victims.
Over half of the cybermentees had coped with the cyberbullying by either telling a friend (57%); telling a parent/carer (53%); telling a teacher (47%) or reporting the cyberbullying to the website (47%). Few mentees involved the police (8%) and some told no one (17%).

Most cybermentees found the cybermentors advice helpful (40%) or very helpful (40%) and said they would use the cybermentor scheme again. They would also recommend cybermentors to a friend. Most comments about the scheme were positive, as two 15 year olds remarked:

“The good part about the session was being to tell someone I don’t know everything and just let it out without getting criticised”

and

“They reassured me that it's not my fault and things can get better. I do not and should not have to put up with it”

However, one 14 year old cybermentee did not like the moderation:

“I felt restricted by what I could say because of netmod (filter) and the rules”

Summary

Although Beatbullying have a high profile in the UK, surprisingly few of the schools returning the interventions questionnaire knew of the CyberMentor’s scheme. As regards the online evaluation by cybermentors and cybermentees, it is remarkable that the vast majority are young females (although it must be acknowledged that those cybermentors and cybermentees choosing to answer the questionnaire are self selecting and not a random sample). This gender imbalance is evident in most peer support schemes (Cowie & Smith, 2010), but this could put boys off accessing the scheme.

There was broadly agreement in the information about cyberbullying incidents from mentors and mentees. Incidents mostly lasted weeks and Facebook was the main means used. The most common coping strategies used by victims for cyberbullying were telling parents; teachers and friends, although more cyberbullied mentees coped by telling peers, whereas more cybermentors reported victims telling an adult. The biggest discrepancy was how serious the incident was seen to be, with mentees thinking the incidents more serious than usual or very serious, against the mentor’s reports of most incidents being average.
On the whole Beatbullying had very positive feedback from the Cybermentors, who thought their training prepared them well; that they felt very safe on the website and well supported by Beatbullying staff. Similarly, Cybermentees mostly found it easy to contact and talk to a CyberMentor, finding the advice helpful or very helpful and would use the scheme again and would also recommend a friend to do so.

Evaluating an online mentoring scheme is challenging. The evaluation by Banerjee et al. (2010) was school based, but this only captured a small minority of users and limited the data. This evaluation also accessed the participants – the cybermentors and cybermentees - where they actually are operating, on the website. However, possibly because the questionnaires were sited on the Beatbullying website this may have led to some bias, as those responding might feel there comments were not entirely confidential. The next development in evaluation could be to use a link from the CyberMentors website to an independent website.


The Safer Schools Partnership was part of the Youth Crime Action Plan, a joint initiative of the Home Office; Department of Children, Schools and Families; Youth Justice Board and Police to address the high level of crime and anti-social behaviour committed in and around schools. A pilot was carried out in 2002 and the partnership was launched in 2006. A Safer Schools Partnership (SSP) was a formal agreement between a school or partnership of schools and police to work together in order “to keep young people safe, reduce crime and the fear of crime and improve behaviour in schools and their communities” (Safer Schools Partnerships guidance, 2009).

An SSP involved a police officer or police community support officer (SSPO) regularly working at a school, or across a number of schools, on a full time or part time basis to help and advise staff and, in particular, at-risk students on a range of issues involving anti-social behaviour, including bullying. Their role was to make schools safer. In some schools, the SSPO’s role evolved in response to an increase in cyberbullying. Some became more proactive, making e-safety presentations and literally laying down the law by prescribing the legality and illegality of online behaviour. In the recent DfE guidelines (2011), schools are advised to use legislation for the most serious forms of cyberbullying. Legislation in England
includes the Malicious Communications Act, 1988; the Protection from Harassment Act, 1997 and section 127 of the Communications Act, 2003.

Bowles, Reyes and Pradiptyo (2005) evaluated the Safer Schools Partnership pilot scheme, finding that it had had “a positive impact and delivered measurable improvements”. In SSP pilot schools, truancy and absence rates had reduced; relationships with and attitudes to the police were distinctly more positive; levels of offending had reduced whilst examination performance had improved. However, the cost of SSP schemes was considerable. A lack of baseline data in recording pupil offending levels; victimisation; fear of crime and anti-social behaviour prevented conclusions on these being drawn.

Our own evaluation of the Safer Schools Partnership was provided solely by schools completing the DAPHNE III interventions for cyberbullying questionnaire.

**Findings**

Although the majority of schools knew what the Safer Schools Partnership (90%) was, just under two thirds of schools used it. Of those schools using a SSPO, most used them on an ‘on demand’ basis, with well over half using them regularly. SSPOs were used preventatively to make annual e-safety presentations to their students, which schools thought they found either helpful (50%) or very helpful (36%).

Despite some schools finding a police officer based on site stigmatising (Bowles et al., 2005), other schools valued their presence. One Assistant Head Teacher commenting in our questionnaire said: 

“It sends a clear message that we take bullying seriously and is appreciated by parents and pupils”.

Of those schools using an SSPO, many (82%) had used them to help them respond to a cyberbullying incident. SSPOs mostly gave advice and issued warnings to pupils, with some also involving the parents. Some SSPOs used restorative approaches to deal with cyberbullying. The impact of the SSPOs involvement in responding to a cyberbullying incident was mostly rated by schools as either effective (51%) or very effective (35%).
Summary
In both the previous evaluation (Bowles et al., 2005) and in our smaller study, Safer School Partnerships were found to be effective but expensive. In the present economic climate of cuts to the police, many SSPOs have been removed from schools and been re-allocated to Safer Neighbourhood teams in the community. Considering the high levels of effectiveness of SSPOs reported by schools in both studies for preventing and responding to cyberbullying, the cuts would appear to be removing a constructive and positive initiative which contributes to making schools safer; supports at-risk young people and children and helps schools tackle the increasing rates of cyberbullying.

Overall discussion
Schools are advised to use a range of strategies to tackle bullying including cyberbullying (DfE, 2011). We have evaluated four strategies: two e-safety films to prevent cyberbullying; a peer support scheme to support cyberbullied young people and an intervention by the police to support schools in responding to cyberbullying incidents.

The two e-safety films were both well rated by students, in all respects. They are clearly effective in the sense of being appreciated and informative. However they appear to have had modest impact on young peoples’ coping strategies for cyberbullying, at best. There was little change in the types of strategy used and the numbers of students using them; although what changes there were, were in a positive direction.

Across the studies, the main difference that we found was in the types of coping strategy used by younger and older students if in future they became involved or they had actually been involved in cyberbullying or sexting incidents. In future, younger students said they would tell an adult and older students said they would confront the person responsible and tell peers. However when we compare the strategies used by young people actually involved in cyberbullying and sexting incidents, both groups tell peers not adults. This has been shown in other studies and emphasises how teachers and parents are excluded from helping.

Another clear finding is that more girls than boys are involved in both cyberbullying and sexting. This highlights the dangers young women face on the internet. Also, sexting episodes start surprisingly young with 13 and 14 year old victims, which makes them a child protection issue.
The Beatbullying CyberMentor scheme has been shown to be highly thought of by their mentors and most importantly by cybermentees - the young people it is there to support. The schemes impact on helping vulnerable young people is evident. There are plans to expand the scheme to other European countries.

The Safer Schools Officers have been reported by schools to have a positive role in tackling cyberbullying. Police officers have a positive role in not only helping define the boundaries of the legality and illegality of cyberbullying but also building bridges between the schools and the communities that surround them. Due to Government cuts the scheme is disappearing and this for many schools will be a loss.

References


