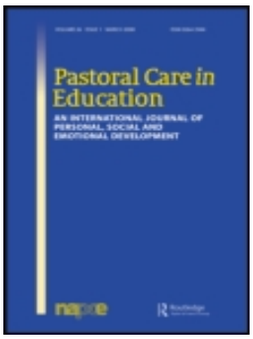

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Cyber-bullying: the situation in Ireland

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This paper reports on the first major survey of cyber-bullying undertaken in Ireland. While preliminary results have been published they were based on a smaller and incomplete sample of 12–16 year olds living in Ireland. The preliminary results addressed the incidence level of cyber-bullying and that of the different subcategories of cyber-bullying (text message bullying, the sending of pictures and video clips via mobile telephones, threatening calls, emails, instant messages and abuse via social networking sites and chat rooms). However, they omitted to provide a comprehensive picture of the views held by the participants to cyber-bullying. Thus the aim of the present paper is to report more thoroughly on the thoughts and feelings that students have to cyber-bullying and the ways in which they cope when subjected to cyber-bullying. The objective is to gain an understanding of cyber-bullying from the perspective of students in order that effective strategies can be developed to prevent and counter cyber-bullying. Across the sample (n = 3004), 13.9% reported that they had been cyber-bullied within the last couple of months and 8.6% confessed to cyber-bullying others. While 29.8% were bullied both offline and online and 24.4% bullied others online and offline, the fact that one in five students were found to be involved either as a cyber-bully, cyber-victim or both reflects that cyber-bullying is a cause of great concern to students, parents and teachers due to the emotional and behavioural problems experienced by them as a result of cyber-bullying, and one that requires urgent action. The views the students hold on cyber-bullying and their implications for prevention and intervention are discussed.

Keywords: *cyber-bullying; traditional bullying; attitudes to cyber-bullying*

Introduction

Cyber-bullying has become a key concern for teachers, parents and educational policy-makers worldwide and ways are actively being sought to effectively prevent and eradicate it. Cyber-bullying has been defined as 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices'

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(Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 5). It can be an extension of traditional bullying with technology providing the perpetrator with another way to abuse their target. Traditional bullying is usually defined as a specific form of aggression, which is intentional, repeated and involves a disparity of power between the victim and perpetrator (Wang *et al.*, 2009). The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) has pointed out the several significant ways in which cyber-bullying differs from traditional bullying. Essentially, 'there is the invasion of home and personal space; the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages; the size of the audience; perceived anonymity; and even the profile of the person doing the bullying and their target' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007, p. 3).

Traditional bullying has been identified as causing significant psychological and psychomatic distress (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), to the extent that self-harm and suicide becomes an option to ease the pain of vicitimisation (O'Moore, 2000; McMahon *et al.*, 2010). Bullying others has also been linked with behavioural and emotional problems, with bullies showing higher levels of depression, anxiety and self-harm (Seals & Young, 2003; Roland, 2002). It has been suggested that the effects of cyber-bullying may be worse than those that accompany traditional bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007; Kowalski *et al.*, 2008).

It is the potential cost of cyber-bullying to the mental and physical health of young people that makes for urgent action to tackle/address the behaviour. O'Higgins-Norman and Connolly (2011, p. 293) have pointed out that 'there is scant research addressing the viewpoints of adolescents and their experiences of cyber-bullying'. The aim of this paper is to examine therefore the views of students on cyber-bullying in the hope that their voices will be heard in a way that may help to shape initiatives to tackle the problem.

A trans-national snapshot given by Shariff (2008) has highlighted the extent of the problem with incident rates of cyber-victimisation ranging from 13% among children as young as eight years of age in Australia to 75–80% of 12–14 year olds in the United States. However, care needs to be taken when comparing incident rates across the world because of the differing definitions of cyber-bullying that have been used by the individual studies. Also there are problems of differing methodologies, reporting periods, age, typology of bullying and the subcategories of cyber-bullying that are surveyed which make studies difficult to compare.

However, a recent survey of 25 European Union (EU) countries (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011) was able to apply the same methodology and measurements in each country and showed that 6% of nine-year-old to 16-year-old Internet users reported having been bullied online and 3% reported that they had bullied others online. Italy and Portugal had the lowest incident rate for being bullied online at 2%, and Estonia had the highest rate at 14%.

O'Neill *et al.* (2011), reporting on the Irish children (aged 9–16 years) who participated in the EU Kids Online Survey, show that only a small proportion (4%) were bullied online, or by mobile phone calls, texts or image/video texts. However, they point out that it was teenagers who experienced the greatest levels of

cyber-bullying: 9% on the Internet and 10% by mobile phone. No incident rate is given for children who bullied others online.

The lower incident rate of cyber-victims among younger children gives support to Williams *et al.* (2008), who showed that 5% of nine year olds were cyber-bullied compared with 40% who had been bullied by traditional means. However, O'Moore & Minton (2009) provide evidence that cyber-bullying may be on the increase. In 2008, when their survey was conducted, 14.2% of 12–16 year olds reported that they had been cyber-bullied. This contrasts with Livingstone *et al.*'s (2011) finding of 19% of victimised students.

A final analysis of the data involving a larger sample size has since been carried out. The aim of the present paper is to report on these findings. The objective is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cyber-bullying among students in Ireland than has been possible to date. The findings should complement, in particular, the Kids Online survey as it pertains in particular to Irish children of adolescent age (O'Neill *et al.*, 2011). In addition the findings will hopefully contribute to shaping anti-bullying initiatives to counter cyber-bullying.

Methodology

Participants

There were 3004 12-year-old to 16-year-old students, with 1009 girls (33.6% of the sample) and 1995 boys (66.4% of the sample). The students represented the entire student body of the first, second, third and fourth years from nine post-primary schools. The schools were selected on the basis of reflecting nationwide trends in school characteristics across six measures: fee paying/non-fee-paying; type (there are four types of post-primary education establishments in Ireland); gender of pupils (boys only, girls only, co-educational); designated as serving an area of disadvantage, or otherwise; size (i.e. number of pupils enrolled); and geographical location, according to the most recent governmental statistics available (Post-Primary School Listings, 2006/07).

Materials and procedure

A 38-item questionnaire was designed in order to ascertain levels of involvement in both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. The style of the questionnaire items was based on both the modified English-language versions (for example, Whitney & Smith, 1993) of the familiar Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1989) and the revised version (Olweus, 1996), and also the cyber-bullying questionnaire developed by Smith *et al.* (2006). The present questionnaire included a definition of both traditional (offline) bullying and cyber-bullying. The definitions to the students were as follows:

> This questionnaire is about bullying. We say that a pupil is being bullied when he or she is singled out in an unpleasant way, and is picked on again and again, by another pupil or group of pupils. For example, it is bullying when a pupil has nasty or unpleasant things said to him or her, or is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, or when no one ever talks to him or her, and things like that. These things can happen often, and it may be difficult for the pupil being bullied to defend himself or herself. Today we would like to look at a special kind of bullying – cyber-bullying. This includes bullying through text messages, pictures or video clips via mobile phone cameras, phone calls, e-mail, chat-rooms, Instant Messaging (IM) or websites (blogs, personal websites, personal polling sites, or social networking sites). Cyber-bullying can happen when text messages/pictures/clips/e-mails/messages etc. are sent to you, but also when text messages/pictures/clips/e-mails/messages etc. are sent to others, about you.

The response categories to assess the frequency with which the students had experienced traditional and/or cyber-bullying were derived from Smith *et al.* (2006) and were as follows: 'once or twice', 'two or three times a month', 'about once a week' and 'several times a week'. It should be noted that there was a question which sought the involvement of all forms of bullying. For the purpose of the results I have termed this traditional bullying. The question asked was as follows: 'How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months (*any* kind of bullying, *including* cyber-bullying)'. The question was followed by a specific one relating to cyber-bullying only, the question being: 'How often have you been cyber-bullied in the past couple of months?' Similar worded questions to being bullied were asked to determine the extent of bullying others.

It is of note that the timeline of the 'past couple of months' is that which is used within the revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). There were five response categories to each of these questions. For example, to the question 'How often have you been cyber-bullied in the past couple of months?' the students could answer: 'A. I haven't been bullied in the past couple of months', 'B. It has only happened once or twice', 'C. Two or three times a month', 'D. About once a week' or 'E. Several times a week'.

The cyber-bullying questionnaires were administered (according to standardised instructions provided) by class teachers in normal school time. Essentially, students were to be seated in such a way that conferring or copying should be avoided, the questions were to be answered anonymously and the importance of answering the questions truthfully was to be communicated to the students. Whilst no time limit for the completion of the questionnaires was to be set, it was possible in all cases to distribute, give instructions, have the students complete and collect up the copies of the questionnaire within a single class period. The questionnaires were returned by the schools for data entry and analysis to Trinity College Dublin's Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre. Due to the higher proportion of boys than girls in the sample, data for the two genders are expressed separately in the tables that follow.

Results

Level of involvement in cyber-bullying and traditional bullying

To estimate the extent of bullying all of the response categories were considered: 'it has only happened once or twice', 'sometimes', 'once a week' and 'several times a week'. This course of action was taken in order to overcome the risk of under-reporting. It is not uncommon for girls in particular to be reluctant to admit that they bully and for boys to report that they are bullied (O'Moore *et al.*, 1997). There were 13.9% of students who reported that they were cyber-bullied and 8.6% who confessed to cyber-bullying others. From Table 1 it can be seen that a total of 41.8% of the students (45.1% boys and 35.3% girls) reported that they had been involved as pure victims, pure bullies and bully-victims in traditional bullying, which encapsulates all forms of offline and online bullying. However, in respect of cyber-bullying the incident rate was much reduced with a total involvement of 18.3% (15.7% boys and 23.6% girls). Table 1 shows the percentage of students who were pure victims, pure bullies and bully-victims. Pure victims were those who reported that they were victims only and had therefore never bullied others. Pure bullies were those who bullied only and had never been victimised. Bully-victims were the young people who admitted to both bullying others as well as being bullied. It can be seen that there were nearly three times as many girls (15.6%) who were cyber-bullied only as compared with the boys (6.9%).

It can further be seen from Table 1 that the higher proportion of boys than girls who were traditional bullies and bully-victims was not reflected to the same degree for cyber-bullying.

The overlap between traditional and cyber-bullying

Over two-thirds (67.4%) of cyber-bullies reported that they also engaged in other forms of bullying. However, almost one-third of the cyber-bullies (32%) admitted to also being traditional victims. The majority (71%) of the cyber-victims were traditional victims, while well over one-quarter (28.9%) were also traditional bullies.

Table 1. Percentages of students in Ireland reporting involvement in traditional bullying (i.e. all forms) and cyber-bullying behaviour

	Boys (n = 1995)		Girls (n = 1009)		Total (n = 3004)	
Involvement	Cyber	Traditional	Cyber	Traditional	Cyber	Traditional
Pure victims	6.9	14.8	15.6	22.8	9.8	17.5
Pure bullies	4.9	15.3	3.5	5.6	4.4	12.1
Bully-victims	3.9	15.0	4.5	6.9	4.1	12.3
Total involvement	15.7	45.1	23.6	35.3	18.3.	41.8*

Witness to cyber-bullying

One-third of the students (39.1% girls and 29.9% boys) reported that they had witnessed classmates being subjected to cyber-bullying. There were also 28.4% (29.4% girls and 27.7% boys) who were aware of those who bullied others.

Witness to cyber-bullying: their ways of coping

Of the 859 students who were witness to cyber-bullying, only 1.3% (1.7% girls and 0.8% boys) alerted a teacher or a parent to the fact that a fellow student was being cyber-bullied. However, it was encouraging that one in 20 (6.3% girls and 4.6% boys) said they tried to stop the bullying. There were also 6.7% of the students who were prepared to support the victims, with more girls (8.5%) than boys (4.8%) willing to do so. One student, for example, remarked 'I helped the person who was getting bullied and taught him how to respond' (Male B).

From the qualitative answers the methods of intervention among the boys tended to involve some form of verbal or physical aggression. For example, one pupil remarked: 'I told the bully to "f" off' (Male C). Another said: 'I beat them up' (Male D). Yet another stated: 'I turned the bully into a victim' (Male E).

There were 6.4% of students (7.4% girls and 5.4% boys) who reported they were upset at what they witnessed but did nothing to stop it. One per cent of students (0.5% girls and 1.5% boys) said that they joined in the cyber-bullying, and sadly another 3.2% (1.9% girls and 4.5% boys) admitted to having fun watching it.

Victims reporting different forms of cyber-bullying

Examining the different forms of cyber-bullying that boys and girls use we find that girls are the primary targets of all forms of cyber-bullying, with the exception of being subjected to mobile camera and video clips (see Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of girls and boys who were victims of different forms of cyber-bullying

	Girls (n = 1009)	Boys (n = 1995)	Total (n = 3004)
Text messages (in school)	11.0	7.4	9.4
Text messages (out of school)	20.4	14.2	17.2
Internet postings (e.g. Bebo, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Nimble)	15.6	10.6	12.2
Camera or video clips	8.0	11.0	9.5
Telephone calls	24.7	20.3	22.7
Emails	9.3	5.1	7.6
Online chatrooms	10.6	8.9	10.9
Instant messages	15.8	11.3	14.1

Table 3. Percentage of boys and girls who used different forms of cyber-bullying

	Girls (n = 1009)	Boys (n = 1995)	Total (n = 3004)
Text messages (in school)	4.1	5.1	5.8
Text messages (out of school)	10.3	10.6	10.4
Internet postings (e.g. Bebo, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Nimble)	5.5	6.4	6.1
Camera or video clips (taken)	12.2	17.2	15.8
Camera or video clips (sent)	4.8	8.4	7.1
Telephone calls	8.6	11.8	10.2
Emails	3.3	3.4	3.1
Online chatrooms	8.6	8.2	8.4
Instant messages	7.8	9.2	8.5

Bullies reporting different forms of cyber-bullying

Table 3 shows that boys, while they perpetrate most forms of cyber-bullying more than girls, rely more on the camera than they do on any other method of electronic bullying. Being noted for being less verbal in their behaviour than girls it is perhaps not surprising that boys would prefer to convey their message using the camera. After all, a picture can be very direct and it has, as we all know, 'the power to tell more than a thousand words'. The fact that boys also tend to be into things that are 'more technical' means that the camera lends itself well in this respect.

Emotional response of victims to cyber-bullying

Figure 1 shows that cyber victimisation caused more girls (29.0%) than boys (19.1%) to feel upset and also to feel frightened (6.7% girls and 5.3% boys). On the other hand, more boys (29.7%) than girls (16.5%) expressed anger. Almost one-third of boys (31.2%) and one-quarter of girls (25.0%) reported that being cyber-bullied did not bother them.

Victims' ways of coping with cyber-bullying

Table 4 shows that victims responded to cyber-bullying in varying ways, ranging from doing nothing, getting really angry, telling a friend or a parent or an adult at school or indeed, as one victim wrote, reporting the abuse to the service provider. Only 16% of the victims (n = 564) asked the cyber-bully to stop. For example, one student remarked: 'I squared up to him and then it stopped' (Male A).

It is not clear whether the reason for choosing not to intervene may be personal or that they may simply not know the identity of the cyber-bully. However, 6.6%

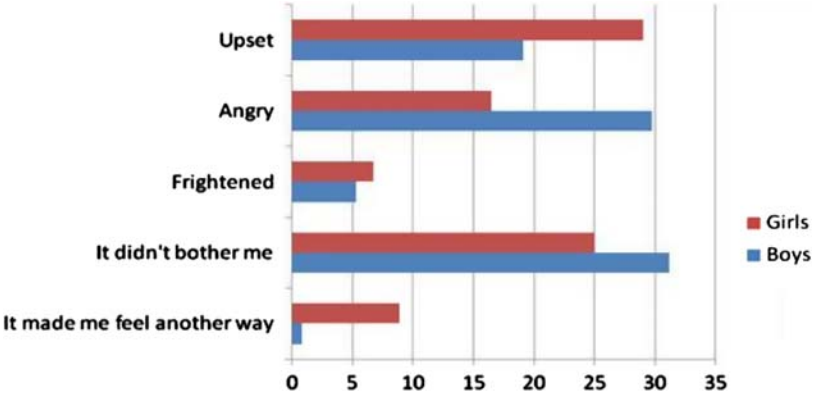

Figure 1. How cyber victims feel when targeted (girls, n = 224; boys, n = 340)

Table 4. How Irish victims responded to cyber-bullying (n = 564)

	Percentage		
Form of cyber-bullying	Girls (n = 224)	Boys (n = 340)	Total (n = 564)
I have told one or more friends	50.2	20.2	35.2
I have told an adult at school	8.0	5.2	6.6
I have told my parents	26.7	10.9	18.8
I was afraid to tell	7.0	6.1	6.6
I have not told anybody	7.0	10.1	8.6
I sent an angry response back	31.4	29.4	30.4
I asked the person to stop	20.9	11.6	16.3
I did not respond	15.8	11.6	13.7
I did something else	17.5	25.5	21.5

were afraid to tell anyone and another 8.6% had not told anybody, with more boys than girls choosing not to tell. Table 4 shows that telling friends (35.2%) was more common than telling parents (18.8%), with girls twice as likely as boys to confide in either of them.

How students in general view cyber-bullying

When the students (n = 3004) were asked what they thought about cyber-bullying it was found that less than one-half of the pupils (47% girls and 43% boys) thought it was wrong. Over one in five (17.5%) reported it upset them, with more girls (25.2%) upset than were boys (14.2%). Considerably more boys (10.9%) than girls (1.6%) thought it was acceptable and a part of life.

Student opinions on prevention and intervention of cyber-bullying

When students were asked 'In your opinion, what can *schools* do to prevent and deal with cyber-bullying', an extremely rich source of very insightful and practical ideas was given. The responses were categorised and can be seen in Table 5.

The most popular response, however, was that schools can do little to deal with cyber-bullying, one reason being that 'they do not have sufficient technology or resources to monitor the cyber-bullying' (Girl A). Another pupil had the following to say:

> I do not believe it is up to the school but to the people within the year. If everyone stands up for one another there would be no cyber-bullying. The only problem is people are too scared to stand up for people because it means they might lose face or popularity. (Girl B)

The fact that most cyber-bullying occurs outside school was recognised by one student as a major obstacle for schools wishing to tackle the problem. The student also felt that 'it is very easy to not get caught' (Male F).

Over one in 10 pupils believed blocking websites would help to reduce cyber-bullying. A much smaller proportion of students suggested the blocking of Internet access (4%) and the forbidding of mobile phones in school (8%). Three times as many girls as boys believed the banning mobile phones in school would be an effective measure. Monitoring student activity was mentioned by 12% of the pupils, a view shared equally between the boys and girls. Of note was the considerably greater number of girls (14.4%) than boys (4.4%) who opted for 'raising awareness among students'. Interestingly, almost twice as many boys than girls suggested counselling. An equal proportion (almost 9%) of boys and girls believed

Table 5. Student opinions as to what schools can do to prevent and deal with cyber-bullying

	Percentage		
	Girls (n = 196)	Boys (n = 596)	Total (n = 794)
Raise awareness/educate students	14.4	4.4	8.3
Appoint a counsellor	6.5	12.8	8.1
Confront the bully and parents	2.7	3.1	2.8
Block websites and individuals	12.4	14.8	13.0
Block Internet access	3.7	3.5	3.7
Forbid mobile phones	9.2	3.1	7.7
Monitor student activity	13.8	10.2	12.8
Respond to reports of incidents	4.5	3.1	4.2
Punish bullies	8.6	8.7	8.6
Cannot/should not do anything	19.4	15.3	18.4
Do not know/indifferent	5.0	2.6	4.4

in punishing the bullies. Punishments varied from expulsion to subjecting tormentors to a 'cattle-prod'. Other suggestions given by the students included responding to reports of cyber-bullying incidents (4.2%) and confronting both the bullies and their parents (2.8%). Unexpected perhaps is that twice as many girls (5%) than boys (2.6%) stated that they had no suggestions to offer or that they were indifferent to the problem of cyber-bullying.

Discussion

While the findings are consistent with other cyber-bullying studies detailed in the country reports by Mora-Merchán and Jäger (2010), indicating that traditional bullying is more prevalent than cyber-bullying, there is little doubt that cyber-bullying affects a substantial number of students with there being at least one in five Irish teens involved in cyber-bullying either as victim, bully or bully-victim. That girls were more likely to be cyber-victims than boys and that boys were more likely to be cyber-bullies supports the findings of a study of US adolescents (Wang *et al.*, 2009), although our difference between the boys and girls was quite marginal. The fact that cyber-victimisation is more prevalent in girls than in boys is perhaps not surprising in view of the more indirect and verbal nature of cyber-bullying.

Also, in advancing Gerard's mimetic theory to explain cyber-bullying, O'Higgins-Norman and Connolly (2011) argue that it may be the many motivations for aggression——such as competition over ideals of beauty and perfection and jealousies over boys——that place girls at particular risk of scapegoating.

The considerable overlap found by the present study in the proportion of students who engage in both traditional and cyber-bullying was also evidenced by other cyber-bullying studies (Mora-Merchán & Jäger, 2010). The EU Kids Online survey (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011), however, showed a lower level of overlap to the present study, with approximately one-half of the cyber victims and bullies across the European countries being offline victims and bullies as compared with over two-thirds of the cyber-bullies and victims in the present study. On the other hand, a report by Frisen and Slonje (2010) on the Scandinavian countries shows that in Norway the vast majority of the cyber-victims (90%) were also traditionally bullied and 85% of cyber-bullies also bullied others in more traditional forms. These levels of overlap would indicate that the personal and contextual characteristics of those involved in cyber-bullying may not be so different from those involved in the more traditional forms. However, the finding that more friends were associated with more bullying and less victimisation for the traditional forms (physical, verbal and relational) of bullying but were not associated with cyber-bullying has prompted Wang *et al.* (2009, p.1) to argue that 'cyber-bullying is a distinct nature from that of cyber-bullying'. Clearly more research is needed to test the validity of the contention that cyber-bullying is simply a 'new bottle but old wine' (Li, 2006, p. 1).

Our finding that one in 20 students reported that they were both bullied and bullied others online reflects that cyber-bullying, like the more traditional forms of

bullying, is a two-way phenomenon (O'Moore *et al.*, 1997). However, the level of cyber-bully victims varies widely from study to study and from country to country with incident levels as high as 54% (Shariff, 2008). The reasons for why more girls than boys both bully and are bullied, as was evident in this study and others, is as yet unclear, but may reflect girls' preference for indirect and verbal tactics when seeking revenge, and cyber-bullying lends itself very much to these behaviours.

The types of cyber-bullying used by students in Ireland is consistent with those reported by O'Neill *et al.* (2011), indicating that most cyber-bullying incidents in Ireland to date originate from mobile phones, with text-messaging being the most common form of cyber-bullying in and out of school. It is of note that the only form of cyber abuse not to be experienced more by girls than boys was that of the camera or video clips (Tables 2 and 3). The reasons for this are not obvious but may simply reflect the leanings of boys towards technical gadgets. It may also be that boys regard humiliating images as having greater emotional impact than verbal messages.

However, it may be only a matter of time before we see a shift in the most preferred form of cyber abuse. For example, the EU Kids Online survey that was carried out two years later than the present study found a narrowing of the gap between mobile phone and Internet bullying, which may reflect the growth of smart phones among our school-going population. Further evidence of a change is seen when comparing online bullying. Our findings (Tables 2 and 3) showed instant messaging, whereas O'Neil *et al.* (2011) who surveyed Irish students two years later found that social networking sites constituted the main platform for online forms of bullying with their more recent sample of Irish 9–16 year olds.

The emotional responses of our cyber-victims from feeling upset (more girls than boys) to feeling angry (more boys than girls) and frightened lends support to Hinduja and Patchin (2009). The finding that no more cyber-victims were affected as compared with the levels reported by Livingstone *et al.* (2011) and that nearly one-third (28.1%) stated that being cyber-bullied did not bother them may reflect that the majority of cyber victims (65.3%) had experienced cyber-bullying only once or twice. Also no account was taken of the duration or type of cyber-bullying, both of which might have a bearing on the impact of the bullying experience.

The way the Irish victims responded to or coped with cyber-bullying is consistent with the coping strategies identified in the literature (Riebel *et al.*, 2009; Parris *et al.*, 2011). However, we found marked gender differences with girls seeking more social support from family and friends than the boys. Also more girls than boys responded in an assertive manner, asking the perpetrator to stop. However, less boys responded passively and when they did respond, judging from their qualitative answers, they tended to respond in a physical way; for example, 'I asked him for a fight' (Male G).

The fact that almost one-third of cyber-victims sent back an angry message indicates the lack of awareness of best practice in relation to dealing with cyber-bullying. On getting angry, one pupil remarked: 'I broke his nose' (Male H). Another said: 'I started a fight' (Male I). Yet another stated: 'I decked him' (Male J).

Our finding that victims of cyber-bullying rarely tell an adult and that only 1% of witnesses to cyber-bullying would tell an adult strongly suggests that all current policies and prevention and intervention strategies need to promote a culture of disclosure.

The relatively low level of support found among those who were witness to cyber-bullying attacks also suggests that there is an urgent need for awareness-raising programmes that not only provide students with an understanding of cyber-bullying but also provide them with the skills to intervene. All too often students would like to help but are not sure how best to do it and many are fearful of the consequences of taking action (O'Moore, 2010).

Further evidence for the need for prevention and intervention programmes to tackle cyber-bullying can be gained from our finding that only 47% of girls and 43% of boys thought cyber-bullying to be wrong. So the challenge is, as with traditional bullying, to dispel the myths that cyber-bullying is acceptable or is part of life.

As students tend to have their finger on the pulse it is important in any review of policy and procedures that they be given a voice (Shaughnessy, 2006). Table 5, for example, shows the range and level of consensus of opinions. Of note, for example, was the recognition of the need for a counsellor in over one in 10 boys. The value of this recommendation should not be underestimated in view of our finding that boys in particular were not inclined to seek help from friends, school staff or parents when subjected to cyber-bullying——a trait that does not seem to improve as male students grow older, as evinced in a study of bullying amongst Irish Third Level students (McGuire, 2010). It is the lack of social support that can so easily put a student at risk of depression, self-harming and suicide.

Any or all of the student suggestions regarding cyber-bullying are worthy of consideration for inclusion in a whole-school community approach to bullying prevention, which has shown itself to date to be the most effective in reducing bullying behaviour nationally and internationally (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010). Even though the authors' meta-analysis pertained to offline anti-bullying programmes, there is no reason to believe that the whole-school approach would not be equally effective for curbing cyber-bullying.

In order for schools, in particular, to implement effective programmes to counter cyber-bullying, Corcoran *et al.* (2011) have shown that the majority of second-level school principals (66.7%) would benefit from help and noteworthy is that they feel this help should be forthcoming from the Department of Education and Skills. So far only 71% of the 45 principals in the study had incorporated cyber-bullying into their anti-bullying policies.

From their responses to an adopted version of the Cyber-bullying Management Questionnaire (McGuckin & Lewis, 2008), Corcoran *et al.* (2011) found four major themes to emerge in terms of principals' desire for assistance. These were: training; resources; guidance; information. *Training* included a desire for provision of workshops for students and staff, sometimes at a very basic level (e.g. 'Staff training in the form of practical introduction to what exactly cyber bullying is'). In

respect of *resources*, principals had a desire for '… more materials for use in the classroom …', and expressed a need for the Department of Education and Skills to 'Make resources available to schools e.g., posters, booklets Facebook'. With regard to *guidance*, principals reported a desire for advice on dealing with cyber-bullying as well as specific aspects of cyberspace, such as social network sites (e.g. 'Guide-lines and directions regarding social networking sites'). Principals also expressed a desire for more *information*, including '… whole staff info sessions …'.

Despite the limitations to the present study——that of the gender imbalance of the sample and the lack of tests of significance to determine the strength of the gender differences——it is to be hoped that the findings will help to shape awareness-raising programmes and, most importantly, strengthen the resolve of all who care for students to prevent and counter cyber-bullying both in and out of school. While resources will clearly be an issue, especially in this climate of recession, the cost to the quality of student's lives (Kowalski *et al.*, 2008) makes cyber-bullying too high to ignore.

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