

**Group M  
Organisation  
Computer Science Students  
Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9**

**Dear Minister Roderic O’Gorman,**

**Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth,**

**We are pleased to enclose here our proposal on *How to deal with the issue of cyberbullying in Ireland* to be implemented by Group M. We hope this proposal will allow you to come to a decision regarding support for this project in the coming weeks. We will not require any financial support however, we do need the cooperation and understanding of the parties involved.**

**Our proposal will outline how we will solve the issue of cyberbullying in Ireland. Our solutions are based on years of research and statistics on the subject, which will be tailored to enhance the future of Ireland’s next generations and prevent something like this from ever happening again.**

***How to deal with the issue of cyberbullying in Ireland* is a project focused on creating a free, open and secure internet where people feel safe online and to cater to the new generations to come. With your support, we will be able to eliminate a large majority of the issues that concern cyberbullying.**

**We will be happy to respond to any questions you may have about the proposal. We can be reached at [Group13@groupM.com](mailto:Group13@groupM.com) or +353-xxx-xxx xxx.**

**We thank you again for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you soon.**

**Regards,**

**Group M,  
Computer Science Students,  
Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9**

# Effects of Cyberbullying

## Group 13

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## **Abstract**

This report provides an overview of How to prevent cyberbullying in Ireland. In Europe, Ireland is considered one of the worst countries for cyberbullying and it will only get worse if Ireland continues to ignore the issue. The report gives an overview of what actions Ireland can take to either lessen or prevent the act of cyberbullying by specifically targeting primary and secondary schools. It reviews the methods of prevention in other countries such as Italy, Russia, America and many more European countries. Ireland is reacting too slowly in terms of the massive surge of online users, for example, “Coco’s Law” was only developed after a tragic incident when a young Irish girl took her own life after years of enduring cyberbullying. The report considers low tech, mid-term and long term solutions to aid in the prevention of cyberbullying in Ireland. These solutions range from the education on how to act for bystanders and the effects on the mental and physical health of the targeted victim to the complete elimination of social media accounts that are below 18 years old by adding proof of identity check during the sign-up phase. These methods are made from many years of research through the comparison of other countries and there are many challenges to implementing these solutions, however, if Ireland as a country does not stop cyberbullying early, It could become a much larger issue as the use of electronic communication is rapidly increasing as the newer generations are much more exposed to such technologies at a very young age.

## **1. Introduction**

This report will outline the effects of cyberbullying in Ireland. It will provide an overview of the analysis of cyberbullying in Ireland, the possible solutions to combat it, and have some conclusions and a final implementation plan in order to help contribute to the prevention of cyberbullying. It will also compare and contrast how other countries deal with cyberbullying with supporting analytical data, as well as a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the solutions considered. Some final thoughts will then be discussed in the end.

## **2. Background**

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying which takes place via devices such as phones, tablets, and computers. Cyberbullying can transpire through text messages, emails, rumours posted on social media, embarrassing pictures, or even fake profiles. There are also many different forms of cyberbullying such as harassment, impersonation, cyberstalking, and cyber threats (Dignam, A., 2019). The victims affected by this behaviour tend to be bullied from the moment they wake up in the morning to the time when they go to bed in the night (Dignam, A., 2019). This is a widespread form of bullying which is a major issue in Ireland,

especially amongst younger children with foreigners being the victims. Various platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are one of the most popular platforms at which cyberbullying takes place. It causes significant, emotional, and physical distress. As well as that, it can instil fears and insecurities of using social media, lead to depression, and lead to low self-esteem. This is worse for teenagers since it can affect them in the long run and even throughout adulthood.

As a result, it is very important that everyone is there to support each other during tough times, even if it seems like someone is not a victim of cyberbullying. People must contribute to the prevention of this form of bullying in order to show that people care.

It is important to spread awareness of cyberbullying, be there for the victims, and always be supportive of those suffering from this attack. This is crucial especially nowadays during the pandemic, where people, especially younger children between the ages of 12 to 17, have been using online platforms much more frequently. Tik Tok is a prevalent social media platform with children and teens actively engaging on this platform. Although much good can come from using social media such as giving the users important connections to friends and family, they are not without risks (Gordon, S., 2020).

Cyberbullying has been increasingly common amongst teenagers, specifically between the ages of 12 to 17, consequently making it the most targetable age for being a victim of cyberbullying. Bullies perform cyberbullying due to revenge or anger, blaming people or the victim, boredom, seeking attention and being power-hungry, and thinking everyone is doing it by getting actively involved with other business. They also tend to think they won't get caught, with a lack of empathy. Sometimes, cyberbullies don't even realise that they're hurting others without minding their words. This is why cyberbullying is so common amongst teenagers since they are still young and unaware of the serious side effects of doing things that can harm others without realising it.

### **3. Analysis**

This section provides an analysis of Cyberbullying in Ireland by using analysis frameworks such as PEST and SWOT.

Firstly we will look at the SWOT analysis framework for cyberbullying in Ireland. A SWOT analysis looks at both internal and external viewpoints in areas such as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats if Ireland implemented the low tech, mid-tech and long term solutions.

A strong strength Ireland would have in regards to cyberbullying is that we have developed workshops to educate students about bullying and educating behaviour for bystanders. These workshops are vital in order for Ireland's youth to realise and recognise and prevent cyberbullying. Both students and bystanders would know how to react in situations where both bullying and cyberbullying is occurring.

A weakness is that the workshops are not mandatory. So potential victims will not gain the advice and knowledge they need about combating or reducing both bullying and cyberbullying.

An opportunity in implementing these solutions is that it would enable internet users to have free, open and secure internet. Where people would be able to feel safe online which will ultimately reduce the malicious cyberbullying attacks that occur on many social media networks every day.

A threat to our solutions is that students would have to spend less time on other mandatory exam subjects. This would cause pressure for both students and parents as they may feel that the workload of work may be increasing or that their time may not be well spent.

Table 1 provides the SWOT analysis for Cyberbullying in Ireland.

Strengths:  Education on cyberbullying for victims and bystanders	Weakness:  It is not mandatory for students to take part.
Opportunities:  A free open and secure internet for people to feel safe online.	Threats:  Pressure from other subjects as less time will be spent on exam subjects.

Table 1. SWOT analysis for Cyberbullying in Ireland.

Next, looking at the PEST framework, it can be used to look at trends such as political, economic, social and even technical trends.

Looking at political trends, the public's overall knowledge of cyberbullying has increased due to high profile cases. This has resulted in new laws and legislations being introduced into the Irish Legal system. These laws have been

introduced to punish those who cyberbully online, but these laws fail in areas where cyberbullying is done anonymously online.

Economic trends, primary and secondary may not have the funding to be able to implement cyberbullying workshops to help prevent cyberbullying from happening in the first place. While the financial impact is also staggering as those who are bullied are more likely to develop psychiatric problems such as depression while also being at a higher rate of self-harm and suicide. Victims tend to suffer physiological side effects due to bullying which can ultimately lead to extreme depression and even suicide.

Looking at the social perspective, teenagers and young adults spend increased time online. There is evidence to suggest that if the “spending time online” ratio to the “face to face communication” is significantly higher than face to face contact then antisocial behaviour such as cyberbullying is more likely to occur.

From the technical perspective, the rise of more social media networks flooding every smartphone application store has built an extremely harmful virtual world. Social media such as TikTok, Snapchat and even Instagram are among those where teenagers are bullied the most. TikTok even allows users to interact with people they may not know with their content, with the comment sections of most viral TikTok videos consisting of mean or hurtful comments. This technical impact makes it all the more easier for attackers to do malicious attacks online from the comfort of their own homes.

Table 2 provides the PEST analysis for Cyberbullying impacts in Ireland.

<b>Political:</b>  Bullying and cyberbullying laws introduced in Ireland.	<b>Economic:</b>  Low funding available in schools prevents workshops from being developed to combat bullying.
<b>Social:</b>  Increased time online results in anti-social behaviour.	<b>Technical:</b>  The rise of social networks - easier for victims to be bullied.

*Table 2. PEST analysis for Cyberbullying in Ireland*

## **4. Looking at other countries**

Cyberbullying is a worldwide phenomenon, many children and teenagers experience bullying on a daily basis all around the world. Different countries have different strategies for combating cyberbullying as each country has its own extremes.

Cyberbullying is quite common in Ireland, particularly among adolescents and young adults. High profile cases of cyberbullying have led to laws developing around the world. In Ireland “Coco's law” was developed and named after a young Irish girl called Nicole Fox who took her life after experiencing extreme bullying and abuse online for many years.

Similar occurred in Italy in 2017 where a new law passed with 432 votes where cyberbullying was denoted as an offence due to many victims committing suicide due to both bullying and cyberbullying. Unlike Ireland and Italy, other countries such as Russia do not take online cyberbullying seriously. This results in the receiver feeling like those who are in authority are actually behind it. Murder threats by phone calls or on the internet are rarely investigated as Russian Authorities believe the evidence is too weak for court cases.

In America, all 50 states have anti-bullying laws which include cyberbullying. These anti-bullying laws require schools to report, investigate and document bullying within a certain period of time.

Many European countries also offer workshops to raise awareness about cyberbullying to give those who are likely to experience cyberbullying the knowledge and awareness to prevent and not partake in cyberbullying. Bullying is not a criminal offence in many other countries such as the United Kingdom, but there are laws in place to punish people who have bullied or cyber-bullied others, such as the “Safe Place To Learn Act” where penalties are suspension, 1 year of jail or even £1000 fine.

## **5. Low-tech solution**

The idea for a low tech solution is to continuously raise awareness about cyberbullying. Since the target audience that is affected by cyberbullying are mostly between the ages of 12 to 17 (DoSomething, 2018), this makes it imperative that we constantly let the younger audience know how serious the issue can be within educational facilities such as schools. Learning what cyberbullying can do is not enough, the populace needs to be informed of how they can actually help when they witness the act of cyberbullying occurring.



There are a few options for the education facilities to be able to implement this. By getting a guest speaker that has experienced cyberbullying, explaining what the effects are, what they have gone through and what they wished bystanders could do to help. This will allow the children to feel empathy towards the victims, get informed of how they can help and even if it does not stop the actual bullies, hopefully, it would instil some bravery into the bystanders that witness the act occur so that they can provide some assistance, advice or inform somebody that can help.

Another option that the education facilities can implement to raise awareness is to play videos and set up activities on the subject. Not only will this catch the attention of students, but students would also be more than happy to participate since it is not actual school work. A well-produced video can convey a lot more information than a guest speaker and also keep the same amount of attention if not more and a well planned out activity can catch the interest of some of the more restless students. This can also show the adolescent that cyberbullying is happening all around the world and it is only getting worse by the day with how much social media is influencing the daily lives of the populace especially in Ireland (Shauna Bowers, 2020).

## **6. Mid-term solution**

A mid-term approach can be effective for some time but will not entirely erase the problem. Making cyberbullying a mandatory module within schools or even organizing regular meetings with parents and students from the same class to discuss it, can be a good starting point.

The general idea is to make young people understand what we say and what we do on the internet have more or less important consequences on the people around us and with whom we speak. Implementing a mandatory module or meeting could therefore help them to have a better understanding of what cyberbullying is and how not to be the perpetrator or how to react if it happens to him. In the case of a cyberbullying module, students could learn with their teacher how social networks work and what are the impacts of their actions. Practical activities on a computer to teach them how to use them better could also be set up. In the other case, that of the meeting, bringing parents and children together all month during one hour to discuss the subject could help young people to better understand the situation. Children take examples from their parents without necessarily realizing it. Getting them all to discuss together and especially seeing the parents discussing could help them become aware of cyberbullying and avoid making mistakes in the future. Unfortunately, this is just teaching, it's not going to stop the cyberbullying overnight. It will help a lot, it's sure but some will not necessarily realize the gravity and may even

continue because they don't see the harm. It remains prevention and not prohibition.

## **7. Long-term solution**

A long-term would involve a more sustainable approach to combat the increasing rate of cyberbullying. One of the things to do would be to make social media strictly for adults (over 18's) since the social media platforms are gaining such a mass following, that is constantly increasing, making it an extremely habitable place for toxic behaviour.

The idea of how we can achieve this is by making it a requirement to provide proof of identity when creating a social media account. Something like a photo of the identity card, better than just asking the age, asking for a picture of their ID card and after the picture was taken, an algorithm can analyse it to find the user's birthday and give them access if the person is 18+. This will ensure that users on social media will be 18+ thus avoiding most instances of cyberbullying. As said a little earlier, the target audience affected by cyberbullying is predominantly 12-17 years old, so limiting the use of social media by young audiences is imperative. The less access the younger ones have, the less they can bully or be bullied. Because around this age, we evolve to be an adult and develop our personality but during this step, it's very difficult to understand the others and know the limit of our action towards them. Therefore limiting access to this easily harmful environment could help young people to build themselves up more easily as adults. Unfortunately, performing such an operation would require the cooperation of the creators of the social media platforms to implement such a feature and maybe all of them will not agree to do something like that. However, nowadays social media has such a massive impact on the development and environment of the young populace, we believe that it should be categorised as a top priority to tackle the major issue of cyberbullying.

## **8. Discussion**

The preceding sections have all explained the effects and importance of what cyberbullying can bring. It also outlines that the case is a global issue that does not only affect Ireland. However, it is a fact that Ireland has one of the worst cyberbullying rates in the EU, as mentioned above. The low tech plan offers a solution that would target a large percentage of the people involved, whether it is the victims or the assailants. This, in theory, would eventually eliminate the problem, however, it would require schools to continuously remind students through an event every so often. This decision would be entirely up to the schools and can be ignored once they know that it is not mandatory.

The midterm solution offers a far greater success rate. Making a mandatory module/class for cyberbullying that is held once every one or two months can have a long-lasting effect as students are constantly reminded of the harm cyberbullying can bring. This can also potentially help targets by including them in group activities that are planned out, building a closer connection as they interact with each other more. The drawback of this however is that making a cyberbullying module/class mandatory requires the rework of the education curriculum to achieve the same educational results as per usual.

Lastly, in terms of being effective globally, our long term solution involves the platforms in which cyberbullying takes place. Once social media creators agree to add proof of identity during the signup process for all users, the effects will be seen immediately. Not only that, there will be positive results in terms of the physical activity of the generations to come. Now that the youth can no longer communicate through social media, this will allow them to build communication and interpersonal skills through face to face contact. The only drawback is that social media platforms will have to keep a record of the user's passport information.

## **9. Recommendation**

Due to the seriousness and widespread nature of cyberbullying we conclude that there is a sufficient need for the short, medium and long term plans to be implemented. Each stage in this roadmap would provide our nation's children with progressively more and more protection from cyberbullying with the long term plan next to eliminating cyberbully as it exists today. We understand that these recommendations would be deemed drastic but need to be interrupted with the context of the damage cyberbullying is inflicting on today's youth population compared to the comparatively minimal benefit it brings in return.

## **10. Implementation Plan**

Unfortunately due to the Covid19 pandemic, our short term plans will need to be moved online due to the suspension of in-person schooling. This move to a more digital approach to schooling has exacerbated the cyberbullying problem. As more and more social interaction is now taking place online we can not emphasise the need for the short term plan involving guest speakers to be rolled out nationally as soon as is physically possible. We estimate this could be achieved in less than one month due to it taking place online.

Our medium-term solution for mandatory cyberbullying classes is a more complex approach. We envision a best-case scenario of these classes being able to begin in the new school year of September 2021. However, we understand that this goal will be a challenging deadline to reach due to all the consultation

with stakeholders as well as development and review needed in the creation of a suitable syllabus.

Our long term solution of age restricting social media platforms to those over the age of 18 will take years to accomplish. We envision the need for legislation to be enacted in order to legally compel social media companies to implement our recommendations. We recommend a staged implementation incrementally increasing the age limit of these platforms year on year until the target is hit. We feel this approach will be less of a culture shock to the general public and more acceptable to the stakeholders.

	March 21	April 21	May 21	June 21	July 21	Aug 21	Sept 21	Oct 21	Sept 22
Short Term Solution									
Medium Term Solution									
Long Term Solution									

Table 3. Proposed GANTT chart of implementation.

## 11. Conclusion

This report provided an overview of the causes, effects and possible solutions for the current state of cyberbullying in Ireland. Unfortunately, there are many challenges facing children growing up in this digitally connected world, many of them good but others causing serious and lasting damages to both the victim and the victims family. The recommendations of immediate training in coping and dealing with cyberbullying followed by a more permanent long term solution of eliminating social media for minors. Our short and medium-term plans are very achievable and cost-effective methods of dealing with the near pandemic state of cyberbullying in this country. However, we are also of the belief that while social media remains available to minors cyberbullying in one form or another will exist hence our recommendation of a staged removal of social media from minors.

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