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Factors associated with young people's successful resolution of distressing electronic harassment

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ABSTRACT

Electronic harassment is a pervasive phenomenon among young people, however relatively little is known about actions that targets of harassment may undertake to manage such abuse, and whether particular actions and personal characteristics are associated with successful resolution of such harassment. This mixed methods research identified whether particular actions or characteristics are associated with the resolution of distressing electronic harassment situations. Study one used focus groups interviews with 36 New Zealand (NZ) students (aged 13–15) to explore strategies used to manage electronic harassment. Study two drew on these findings, in conjunction with literature reviews, to construct a questionnaire delivered to 1673 students (aged 12–19). Over half of participants used more than one strategy to try and resolve the abuse. Ignoring abuse was the most popular strategy, followed by confronting and fighting strategies. However, multivariate logistic regression showed ignoring did not predict resolution, and nor did received adult or family support. However a sense of efficacy in approaching adults did predict resolution. The quality of intervention, rather than the type of intervention per se, seems to be critical in the successful resolution harassment. Reflecting on both studies we suggest the need to increase young people's confidence in actively dealing with harassment as well as supporting adults and peers to provide effective support.

1. Introduction

Electronic harassment involves the use of the Internet or mobile phones to intentionally harass another person. Cyberbullying refers to a subset of this phenomenon (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007), and while variously defined (Tokunaga, 2010), usually addresses electronic harassment that is repeated and involves a power imbalance between the target and the person(s) producing the bullying. Electronic harassment and cyberbullying have been associated with distress, including symptoms of depression (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), social problems (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006), truancy, carrying weapons to school (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007), and social anxiety (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). There is considerable variation in estimated rates of such harassment (Internet Safety Technical Task Force [ISTFF], 2008; Tokunaga, 2010), however a number of larger studies in the USA, the United Kingdom (UK), and New Zealand (NZ) indicate that around 10–40% of young people report electronic harassment annually (Clark et al., 2009; Cross et al., 2009; Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Livingstone & Bober, 2004; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Mitchell, & Korchmaros, 2011).

Young people may use social support, technological measures, retaliation, or ignore the situation, when responding to electronic harassment (Cross et al., 2009; Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Wolak et al., 2007). To date, no research has been carried out to assess to what extent these strategies are associated with *successful* resolution of the situation. Successful

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resolution may reflect a variety of outcomes, including the simple cessation of the harassment, consequences for those doing the harassment behaviours, or some restorative justice process (Morrinson, 2007).

The ability to successfully manage challenges may depend on young people's levels of family support as well as their self-efficacy in developing peer support and seeking adult help. The coping literature emphasises the importance of positive relationships in the management of challenging situations (Wyman, Sandler, Wolchik, & Nelson, 2000), particularly relationships that provide social support (Werner, 1995) as well as love and trust (Compas & Reeslund, 2009; Rutter, 2000; Werner). Additionally, communication skills and social self-efficacy (Werner), a willingness to seek help, and the ability to obtain information and guidance (Compas & Reeslund), have all been identified as factors that help young people cope with serious challenges. Research has yet to explore if these factors are associated with successful resolution of harassment (c.f. associations with less harassment – i.e., Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; Wang et al., 2009).

A number of studies have explored how electronic harassment and cyberbullying experiences differ by gender. In general boys report more overt aggression and more normative beliefs about the legitimacy of overt aggression than girls (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). However this gender differential may only apply to overt aggression. Societal expectations about the inappropriateness of overt aggression amongst girls and young women may mean that forms of aggression (e.g., covert aggression) that are not so heavily proscribed, may be more popular among girls (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001). This could produce situations where girls are more likely produce and face more covert forms of harassment, including electronic harassment. Some studies indicate that young women and girls are more likely to report electronic harassment (e.g., Dehue et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Wang et al., 2009; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008), while others find no gender differences (e.g., Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra, 2004). Our own study (Fenaughty and Harré, submitted for publication) demonstrated gender differences in particular forms and producers of harassment and we are interested to explore whether gender differences are associated with successful resolution of electronic harassment situations.

The first study described here involved focus groups with young people to explore what strategies they used to resolve harassment. A quantitative survey then examined if the strategies identified in the focus groups were associated with successful resolution. In keeping with findings from previous research discussed above, self-efficacy, adult help seeking, and family support, and gender differences in the successful resolution of distressing electronic harassment were also examined in the survey.

2. Study one: focus groups

Study one involved eight focus groups with three to seven young people in each from diverse schools (see Table 1). Participant ($N = 36$) ages ranged from 13 to 15 years with 44.5% males and 55.5% females.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on how participants' would, or did, respond to cyberbullying. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with names changed to protect identities. As advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006), Chamberlain (1999), and Morgan (1988), the analytic approach involved reading through the transcripts and building up themes that described points of interest. Three themes captured participants' management of electronic harassment.

The first theme was social support. Three main sources were identified: parents and caregivers, other adults and peers. Despite the key role that parents and other primary caregivers play in nurturing children's development (Compas & Reeslund, 2009; Rutter, 2000; Werner) the majority of participants reported that they would not communicate with their parents about most experiences of electronic harassment. They worried about overreaction, being blamed and having their mobile phone confiscated or being banned from the Internet. For example, one girl commented, "It's straight taking you off the phone and say 'you're not going to get this phone anymore and that's why I told you you're not ready to get cell phones'." In every group, at least some participants agreed it would have to be extremely serious before they would involve their parents. The minority who indicated they would talk to their parents anticipated an attentive, sympathetic approach with useful strategies for managing the situation.

Attempted support from other adults, including school staff, extended family, and employers was also considered problematic by most participants for similar reasons to those expressed in relation to their parents, and was seen as useful only if an issue if it was very serious, especially if physical violence had already occurred. In contrast to their ambivalence about adult assistance, the overwhelming majority of participants said that they used forms of peer assistance in managing harassment, even at the early stages of a potential threat and even if they also sought adult help. Unlike adults, peers were seen as not "out of touch" and likely to overreact. Peers were also perceived to have more expertise with these issues. Additionally, peer preference may reflect the increased time young people spend among peers relative to parents, sometimes, as Felix (FG 5) pointed out it can just be a matter of who is around: "It is more comfortable talking to people that have the same problems or whatever and that you spend – because you spend more of your day with your mates than with your parents because obviously you are here [at school] for most of the day."

The second theme was attempting to solve the problem directly. When facing electronic harassment, participants sometimes described confronting or retaliating against those involved. Retaliation could involve electronic and/or face-to-face means (e.g., harassing them back on a mobile phone as well as physically fighting). Some described getting their friends to assist, for example by harassing them with a bombardment of texts. Technical solutions were another strategy. This included blocking communication, reducing the amount of private information they had on social network sites and changing online account names or email addresses to avoid harassment.

The third theme centred around ignoring harassment, in the hope that it would fade out of significance or to show it was not "getting to them". For example, one participants said: "Because then if you text them back the first time it's like they've won, probably."

2.1. Summary and discussion of study one

In being reluctant to approach adults, these New Zealand young people highlighted an interesting conundrum in the literature in this area. As discussed previously, in theory, positive family relationships and the ability to seek and get support from adults should help young people resolve challenging situations. However, international studies have found, as we did, that adult help is considered a last resort. For instance, the second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS2) study of 1500 10–17-year-old participants in the USA found that only 12% of young people who were sexually harassed online told a parent about the situation (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). Even fewer (9%) YISS2

Table 1
Focus group participant demographic information ($N = 36$).

Focus group characteristics	Name[a]	Age	Sex	Ethnicity[b]
Focus Group 1:				
State school, co-ed, metropolitan, low decile (3).	Pete	14	Male	NZ European
	Helen	13	Female	NZ European
	Honor	15	Female	NZ European
	Simon	15	Male	NZ European
Focus Group 2:				
State school, single sex, metropolitan, high decile (10)	Eva	15	Female	NZ European
	Sian	14	Female	NZ European
	Jenny	15	Female	NZ European
	Libby	15	Female	NZ European
Focus Group 3:				
State school, co-ed, metropolitan, low decile (2)	Tia	15	Female	Tongan
	Lucy	14	Female	Samoan
	Anne	15	Female	NZ European
	Mana	14	Male	Tongan
Focus Group 4:				
State school, single sex, metropolitan, high decile (9)	Trish	15	Female	NZ European
	Mary	15	Female	NZ European
	Jill	14	Female	NZ European
	Becky	14	Female	NZ European
	Joan	14	Female	NZ European
	Mags	14	Female	NZ European
	Emily	14	Female	NZ European – Fijian
Focus Group 5:				
State school, co-ed, metropolitan, high decile (10).	Kate	15	Female	Malaysian
	Tim	15	Male	NZ European
	Sarah	15	Female	Asian New Zealander
Focus Group 6:				
Independent school, co-ed, metropolitan, high decile (10).	Mike	13	Male	NZ-Australian
	Jack	14	Male	Korean
	Kevin	13	Male	Kiwi-Chinese
	Felix	14	Male	NZ European
	Neil	14	Male	NZ European
	Paul	14	Male	NZ European
Focus Group 7:				
State school, single sex, metropolitan, mid decile (5).	Rick	14	Male	NZ European
	Marty	15	Male	NZ European
	Sean	15	Male	Pākehā
	Bob	15	Male	NZ European
Focus Group 8:				
State school, co-ed, non-metropolitan, mid decile (6).	Cindy	15	Female	NZ European
	Stu	14	Male	Unspecified
	Tony	15	Male	White
	Sue	14	Female	NZ European

[a] Names have been changed to protect identities.
[b] Ethnicity descriptors were self-defined.

participants reported this challenge to other adults like teachers, Internet service providers, or law enforcement agencies (Wolak et al., 2006). Another USA study found that only 10% of young people who were cyberbullied ($n = 1047$) reported the experience to adults (including parents) (Wang et al., 2009). Only 8.9% of 210 Swedish secondary students who experienced cyberbullying reported their experience to parents and caregivers (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Participants in the current study were wary of adult involvement due to concerns of adult overreaction, being blamed for the problem, and most significantly, having their access to the technology restricted. Concerns of technology sanctions were also reported in the first YISS (Finkelhor et al., 2000), the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS) (Cross et al., 2009), and by 31% of cyberbullied participants in Juvonen and Gross's (2008) USA study who did not talk about their experiences because they were "...concerned that their parents might find out and restrict their Internet access" (p. 502). A third of Juvonen and Gross's participants also said they did not report cyberbullying to adults for "fear that they could get into trouble with their parents" (p. 502).

However, a reluctance to talk with adults following cyberbullying may also reflect that adult intervention may ironically worsen the situation. Cross and colleagues' research (2009) found that in around half of covert bullying situations (including cyberbullying), school-adult intervention either had no effect or made it worse! With these points in mind, in study two we wished to explore whether parental and adult help was associated with successful resolution to the harassment.

The focus groups indicated that young people frequently utilised peer support. Peers were often perceived to be more available, knowledgeable, and helpful, than adults. Again, this is consistent with international literature showing peers to be preferred sources of support following covert bullying in Australia (Cross et al., 2009), and electronic harassment in the USA (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Wolak et al., 2006), the UK (Livingstone & Bober, 2004), and Sweden (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Apart from the straightforward and undramatic way peers approach problems, our participants, like young people in the UK (Ofcom, 2006) and Europe (Kalmus, 2007), thought peers were much more technologically savvy than adults. Both the rates of seeking help from peers and their role in successful resolutions became a key interest in study two.

Participants discussed a range of self-directed management strategies, including confronting and retaliating against people who harassed them. Such retaliation was also reported by some young people in US (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Wolak et al., 2006; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007), Australian (Cross et al., 2009), and Dutch (Dehue et al., 2008) research. The technological solutions such as blocking and changing email address to avoid harassment used by some participants have also been reported in Australian (Cross et al., 2009) and US (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Wolak et al., 2007) research. In study two we aimed to investigate whether these strategies were related to successful resolution.

Ignoring harassment was the final theme identified in our qualitative analysis. Over half of the Australian teenaged (Year 8 and 9) participants who experienced covert bullying in the ACBPS, said they had reacted by not responding "to the nasty or threatening emails/messages" (Cross et al., 2009, p. 210). While ignoring bullying and harassment seemed to reflect popular advice, there were hints in the focus groups that it was not always effective. Interestingly, Cross et al. found high rates of ignoring in *conjunction* with other active strategies indicating that ignoring is often an inadequate strategy and is later surpassed by other strategies. We were keen to explore this further in Study two.

Most focus groups were not obviously marked by gender differences with regards to the management of electronic harassment. However, noting the ongoing debate about gender differences for this phenomenon, we decided to explore a gender analysis in Study two.

3. Study two

Study two surveyed 1673 NZ secondary school students. In addition to exploring the strategies mentioned above, the survey explored the role of family support and social and help-seeking self-efficacy in successful resolution of distressing electronic harassment.

4. Method

4.1. Recruitment

After a pilot study, five high schools were recruited. The schools sampled produced a diverse demographic with participants from metropolitan, non-metropolitan, co-educational and single-sex schools. Socio-economic status (SES) differences were indexed via decile rankings; for funding purposes, NZ schools are ranked based on their students' SES, with 10 representing the highest 10% of social economic indicators and 1 the lowest 10%. This study included schools across a range of decile ratings (4–10), with around 80% of participants in deciles 4 and 5.

4.2. Response rates

Table 2 describes the response rates and school sample sizes. After incomplete or suspicious surveys [$n = 148$] were removed, the final sample size ($N = 1673$) represented an approximate response rate of 53.7%.

4.3. Participants

A gender skew was present in the data; 62.3% of participants who provided gender information ($n = 1668$) were female ($n = 1039$). The ages of participants ranged from 12 to 19, with a mean of 15.3 ($SD = 1.44$). Participants were able to select any number of ethnicity descriptions (and/or describe "Other" ethnicities), and 8.5% ($n = 141$) selected more than one ethnicity description. The majority (38.9%, $n = 651$) identified as 'NZ European or Pākehā', followed by 'Asian' (23.0%, $n = 385$), 'Indian' (19.4%, $n = 324$), 'Other Ethnicity' (10.1%, $n = 169$), 'Pasifika' (9.1%, $n = 152$), Māori (4.6%, $n = 77$), and 'Other European' (4.4%, $n = 74$).

4.4. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the results and language of the focus group research. Only items relevant to the current study are described, and the full questionnaire is described elsewhere (Fenaughty, 2010).

4.4.1. Electronic harassment and distress

Mobile phone and Internet harassment situations were surveyed distinctly. Participants were asked if in the past year: "someone ever tried to use [a mobile phone] [the Internet] to bully or be mean and hurtful to you". Participants who reported electronic harassment were asked how they felt about their most serious experience on a five point scale: "Extremely upset", "Very Upset", "Upset", "Just a little bit

Table 2
Characteristics, response rates, and sample sizes, for participating schools.

	School characteristics			Final sample[a]	
School	Region	Metropolitan	Decile rating	Response rate	Sample size
A	Waikato	No	5	53.7%	175
B	Auckland	Yes	4	56.8%	978
C[b]	Otago	No	5	51.2%	241
D	Wellington	Yes	8	66.7%	90
E[b]	Auckland	Yes	10	64.0%	189
Sample total				53.7%	1673

[a] The final sample values represent the numbers of participants from each school after incomplete or suspicious surveys were removed from the data set.
[b] Single-sex girls schools.

upset", "Not at all upset". The YISS2 questionnaire also used this as a measure of distress (Wolak et al., 2007). If a participant reported being upset, very upset, or extremely upset, this was categorised as "distressed". This analysis focused on distressing experiences, because like Hasebrink, Livingstone, and Haddon (2008), we considered these a marker of "harm" (p. 24).

4.4.2. Management strategies: social support, ignoring, self-action

Participants could choose multiple responses to describe actions taken following distressing harassment. These items included support elicited from parents and caregivers, other adults, and peers, and self-directed actions, including technical and confronting/fighting solutions, and/or ignoring as a strategy (see Table 3). An "other" option was provided; where these responses fitted an existing category, they were recorded as such.

4.4.3. Successful resolution

Participants who reported distressing harassment were asked if that "issue or experience" was "sorted out". The responses, on a five-point scale, included: 1. "No, it was not sorted out at all"; 2 (blank); 3. "It was kind of sorted out but there's still some issues"; 4. (blank); 5. "Yes, it was sorted out". As described later, for the purposes of the analysis, these responses were re-categorised as "resolved" (scores 4 or 5) or "not resolved" (scores 1, 2 or 3).

4.4.4. Adult help seeking self efficacy and social self efficacy

Two self-efficacy scales were used to measure adult help seeking self-efficacy and social self-efficacy respectively (Moore, 2005; Qiao & McNaught, 2007). Each had response categories on a six-point scale (1. *Not well at all* to 6. *Very well*). The adult help seeking scale included four items, for example: "How well can you get adults to help you with a problem?" The social scale included eight items, for example: "How well can you become friends with other people?" The Cronbach's alphas in the current study were .80 (adult help seeking) and .87 (social).

4.4.5. Family support

Six items assessed perceived level of emotional and practical support from participants' families, for example, "How often could you use them as examples of how to deal with your problems?" These items were adapted from the *Multi Dimensional Support Scale* (MDSS) (Winefield, Winefield, & Tiggemann, 1992) and were introduced by a preamble ("For this question, please **think of your family**, especially the **2–3 members** who are **most important** to you…"). The Cronbach's alpha was .87.

5. Results

Although the survey measured some variables in an interval fashion, strongly skewed or binomially distributed results resulted in the construction of a number of dichotomous variables. As such, the analysis used Pearson's Chi-Square test, Fisher's exact test, and logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression analysis involved assessing univariate predictors for significance before combining such predictors into a broader model to test multivariate significance. In all cases, the assumption of normality of the data is not assumed, [2-tailed] significance of at least $p < .05$ was achieved, independence of variables was required, and sample size assumptions of these categorical tests were met (i.e., five or more cases per cell in Pearson's Chi-Square test, and no less than one per cell in 20% of the logistic regression cells) (Field, 2009). Additional assumptions (e.g., see Field) for multivariate logistic regression were met for these analyses, including ensuring no significant co-linearity, the linear distribution of scale variables, at least 15 cases per explanatory variable, and meeting the Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test. Gender differences were tested for, as per the research questions, and all significant findings are described in text.

Around half of those who reported mobile phone (53.7%, $n = 203$) and Internet (48.0%, $n = 131$) harassment, said that the experience was upsetting, very upsetting, or extremely upsetting. These participants were categorised as distressed and form the population of interest in this analysis. Table 4 shows the management strategies used. At around 70%, ignoring was the most common strategy used on both modalities, with chi-square analysis finding no significant differences between males and females. However, while popular it may not have

Table 3
Description of management strategies.

Management variable	Survey responses included in variable
Ignoring	Nothing – it stopped by itself
	Nothing – I didn't know what to do about it and it is still happening
	Nothing – it's still happening, but I don't care about it
	I ignored it to make it go away
Social support (peers)	I chatted (including online) to a friend about it
Social support (parents and caregivers)	I talked to a parent or caregiver about it.
Social support (other adults)	I talked to an adult at school about it
	I talked to another adult about it
	I talked to someone at a help-line about it
	I reported it to the Police
	I reported it to my mobile phone company
	I talked to another adult I trusted about it
Self action (technical solutions)	I electronically "blocked" or "banned" that person
	I reported it to the host of the website or web-service
	I reported it to my Internet Service Provider (ISP)
Self action (confrontation and fighting)	I told them to stop doing it (I confronted or warned them)
	I fought back online or on a mobile phone (e.g., sending them mean messages, etc.)
	I fought back physically

Table 4
Management strategies of participants who reported distressing electronic harassment.

	Proportion reporting use of management strategy						Proportion using more than one strategy	Proportion reporting resolution
	Social support			Self action		Ignore		
Electronic modality	Parent	Other adults	Peers	Technical solutions	Confrontation			
Mobile Phone ($n = 203$)	23.2%	22.7%	29.6%	7.9%	51.2%	69.5%	52.7%	54.3%
Internet ($n = 131$)	16.8%	20.6%	29.8%	27.5%	43.5%	75.6%	52.7%	55.4%

been particularly effective; 61.3% and 46.4% of those who used ignoring on mobile phones, and the Internet, respectively, also used other management strategies. The focus group data suggested that ignoring was the preferred management strategy (being in some ways the easiest to carry out), and when it did not resolve the situation, participants often resorted to other strategies. Confrontation was the second most popular strategy, again no gender differences were found.

Social support from peers was the third most popular strategy, used by 29.6% of participants. One significant gender difference was identified with four times more females (37.1%) than males (8.8%) reporting talking with peers about distressing Internet harassment ($p = .002$, Fisher's exact test). Parents and "other adults" were less popular sources of support than peers. There were no significant gender differences for use of parental support, but males (39.5%) were twice as likely as females (18.8%) to report telling "other adults" about mobile phone harassment ($\chi^2(1) = 7.54$, $p = .009$; $OR = 2.82$, 95% CI = 1.32–6.02).

Participants rarely used technical solutions for mobile phone harassment, and only a quarter attempted using them to resolve Internet harassment. Males (18.4%) were more likely to report using technical solutions to manage mobile phone harassment than females (5.5%) ($\chi^2(1) = 7.15$, $p = .15$; $OR = 3.92$, 95% CI = 1.36–11.36), however there were no gender differences in technological management of Internet harassment.

Just over half of those who experienced distressing electronic harassment reported successful resolution (see Table 4). Table 5 shows the characteristics of participants who reported successful resolution, including which strategies they used, their gender, and their scores of the various self-efficacy and social support scales. Univariate logistic regression was conducted to further examine whether these factors were associated with resolution. For mobile phone harassment three factors were significantly associated with resolution, including the use of ignoring strategies ($p = .016$), and scores on the adult help seeking ($p < .001$) and family support ($p = .006$) scales. For Internet harassment, two factors were associated with resolution, including using 'other' adults to help ($p = .004$) and scores on the adult help seeking scale ($p = .006$).

In order to explore which of these significant variables were most likely to predict resolution, each modality was assessed separately and all significant univariate predictors were entered simultaneously into a multivariate regression (see Table 6). For mobile phone harassment this model accounted for 12% of the variance in resolution outcomes. The model found that only the use of ignoring strategies and scores on the adult help seeking scale significantly predicted the odds of resolution from mobile phone harassment. When holding the variables in the model constant, participants who did not ignore mobile harassment were 2.08 times more likely to say they had resolved this challenge than those who used ignoring strategies. Similarly, controlling for the use of ignoring strategies and family support scale scores, participants who scored one point higher on the six-point adult help seeking scale were 1.41 times more likely to report successfully resolving this challenge than those participants who did not.

For Internet harassment the multivariate model accounted for 18% of the variance in resolution outcomes. Both significant univariate factors continued to predict resolution of distressing Internet harassment in this analysis (See Table 6). When holding the variables in the model constant, participants who scored one point higher on the adult help seeking scale were 1.63 times more likely to report resolving this challenge than those who did not. Conversely, controlling for adult help seeking scores, participants who used 'other adults' to help manage the situation were 3.85 times more likely to report *not* resolving this challenge.

6. General discussion

Young people use multiple strategies to manage distressing electronic harassment, including particular social supports. Higher scores on the Adult Help Seeking Efficacy scale were, out of all the factors, most commonly associated with resolution. Fascinatingly, reports of *actual* adult support were negatively associated with resolution. This finding may reflect that young people who were adept at adult help seeking have previously learnt useful ways to manage challenges from prior adult help. This knowledge may have empowered them to resolve harassment without adult support. Alternatively, the quality of adult support may vary widely in this sample so that useful help was counterbalanced by responses that impeded resolution. This possibility was supported by the qualitative data, which demonstrated considerable differences in attitudes towards adult support. Previous quantitative research has found that adult assistance can be

Table 5
Factors associated with the successful resolution of distressing electronic harassment.

	Characteristics and strategies used by participants who reported successful resolution										
	Elicited social support			Self-action		Ignoring	Gender				
	Parents	Other adults	Peers	Technical solutions	Confrontation & fighting		Female	Male	Mean adult help seeking score	Mean social self-efficacy score	Mean family support score
Mobile Phone ($n = 107$)	18.7%	21.5%	30.8%	6.5%	51.4%	61.7%*	56.5%	43.2%	4.11***	4.68	3.00**
Internet ($n = 72$)	12.5%	11.1%**	27.8%	23.6%	36.1%	77.8%	59.4%	44.1%	3.99**	4.53	2.74

Note. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

Table 6
Multivariate logistic regression results of significant univariate predictors associated with resolving distressing cyberbullying.

	Model predictors and constant	*B* (*SE*)	95% CI for odds Ratio			Model χ^2 (*df*)	R^2 (Nagelkerke)
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper		
Mobile phone ($n = 197$)	Ignoring	−.74* (.33)	.25	.48	.92		
	Adult help seeking	.34* (.16)	1.03	1.41	1.93		
	Family support	.36 (.23)	.91	1.43	2.25		
	Constant	−1.64 (.74)				18.50 (3)***	.12
Internet ($n = 130$)	Adult help seeking	.49** (.17)	1.17	1.63	2.26		
	Other adult support	−1.49** (.49)	.09	.26	.58		
	Constant	−1.28 (.63)				18.45 (2)***	.18

Note. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

counterproductive, with half of the teenaged participants in the ACBPS reporting that in-school intervention in bullying resulted in a worse or unchanged situation (Cross et al., 2009).

Somewhat more positively, elicited support specifically from parents and caregivers was not associated with decreased resolution. However, neither was it positively associated with resolution, despite higher scores for family support being associated with resolution of mobile phone harassment in the univariate analysis. This may again reference the varied *quality* of parental/caregiver support. Alternatively, like adult help-seeking self-efficacy, higher scores on the family support scale, may point to an underlying confidence or background resource that contributes to the young person's overall ability to manage the situation. In other words, a history of support from caregivers and other adults may produce a young person more able to resolve difficult situations, but that does not guarantee the adults concerned will be able to help with individual cases of harassment.

Neither social self-efficacy nor seeking help from peers was associated with positive outcomes, despite the popularity of peers as supports. However, this popularity may not reflect a preference for peers for assistance, but be simply because peers, as discussed in the focus groups, may be present when young people are electronically harassed. Nonetheless, the popularity of peers as a support suggests that interventions that support peers to provide effective support would be useful.

Although ignoring was the most popular management strategy, it negatively predicted mobile phone harassment resolution. It is interesting that ignoring was problematic for mobile phone rather than Internet harassment. Perhaps it is harder to effectively ignore a device that is constantly with you and demands attention in a way the Internet does not. Notably, over half who ignored harassment resorted to using at least one other management strategy as well. Unfortunately, the survey was unable to determine which strategies (e.g., ignoring or confronting etc.) were the preferred first choice for managing these challenges, however as noted earlier the qualitative data suggested that ignoring was perceived to be best approach.

Although technical solutions were often mentioned as a response strategy in the qualitative research, this strategy was also not predictive of resolution. This may partly reflect the small number of effective technical solutions available, particularly for mobile phone harassment. Although blocking technologies are available for Internet harassment, they may be inadequate to deal with the fluid Internet environment where harassers can easily create additional online profiles thus circumventing blocking. Additionally, the Internet can enable powerful covert harassment opportunities that centre on distributing rumours and content to others, thus disabling blocking as an option (i.e., the target is not privy to the harassing communications to block them).

Confrontation and fighting were not predictive of resolution nor with exacerbating the issue. Again this may reflect the variability of this as a strategy, with focus group participants indicating that confrontation could vary from requesting someone stop the harassment to physical confrontation.

The gender analysis produced mixed results. Although, significant gender differences were found in the use of peer and 'other adult' support, and technical management strategies, following mobile phone harassment, no significant gender differences were identified in terms of the successful resolution of electronic harassment on either electronic modality. This finding is particularly significant given previous research highlighting that significantly more females than males reported both electronic harassment and distress from harassment and suggests support for female students is particularly critical.

The small R^2 Nagelkerke values displayed in Table 6 caution that these models are only accounting for a small amount of the variance in resolution. While these were the factors identified in study 1, it is possible we missed important concepts that were not produced in the focus groups. This may especially be around confidence and skills, given that one of our self-efficacy measures and a family support measure did appear to play a positive role in resolution. The simplest explanation, however, and the one supported by the focus groups is that most of the variance in outcome lies in the way in which strategies are used, and the response of the people whose help is sought, rather than in the strategies and support categories per se. It is also likely that some types of harassment are more amenable to particular strategies than others. Future research is required to assess in more detail how the specific qualities of each management strategy are associated with resolution. Such research could utilise diary approaches and longitudinal analyses to tease out the interplay between the type of harassment, the action of the person being harassed, and the quality of the support received.

7. Conclusion

Young people utilise a range of strategies, often simultaneously or concurrently to manage distressing challenges. When young people feel effective in seeking help, this appears to improve their chances of resolving distressing harassment, more so than simply seeking help, whatever the source. This implies a need to up skill young people to request effective assistance, and to up skill adults to respond effectively to young people's requests for assistance. Adult responses that involve technology sanctions, "drama", and punishment, are not likely to be valued by young people. Young people could also be supported to respond effectively to social support requests from their peers, given that we found no evidence for them being especially helpful in promoting resolution from distressing electronic harassment.

Despite the possibilities, electronic harassment is not particularly amenable to technical solutions, nor was confrontation associated with resolution. However, ignoring distressing harassment, through a common strategy, may be worse than at least trying to solve the problem. Supporters of young people should be encouraged to respond with calm support, listen, empathise, not take control of the situation (unless such control is willingly ceded), to discourage ignoring as a strategy, and instead help them collect the electronic evidence and find an adult or authority they can trust to both react compassionately *and* effectively to address the interpersonal features of the situation. While technological solutions are not significantly associated with successful resolution these can play an important role in preventing direct electronic aggression, and are recommended in those cases. These findings highlight opportunities for everyone, including young people themselves, either as targets or as friends, to help resolve distressing electronic harassment situations.

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