

Victims say face-to-face bullying worse than cyber-attacks

March 10 2015, by Debra Nowland

"You see their smile, hear their laugh, see their face, see you break down," girl student, 12.

"Because you can't block face-to-face bullying," boy student, 16.

Both children were among 156 students who participated in an Australian study, led by QUT, to describe their perceptions of being bullied.

The research, led and supervised by Professor Marilyn Campbell from QUT's Faculty of Education, investigated the students' responses to both cyber and face-to-face bullying and asked which was more hurtful.

The study was published February issue of the Journal of School Violence titled "Students' Perceptions of Their Own Victimization: A youth voice perspective".

Professor Campbell said the findings indicated significantly more victims perceived traditional bullying to be more harsh and cruel than [cyberbullying](#).

"It clearly indicates the feelings of the children and the very real threat they have of being physically harmed by another child," she said.

She said earlier studies found Australian school students reported the highest prevalence of peer aggression among OECD countries.

Professor Campbell said the study showed 59 percent of the children participants felt face-to-face bullying was worse for them than being cyberbullied.

Twenty-six per cent reported that both forms of bullying were equally hurtful and the remaining 15 per cent perceived cyberbullying to be worse.

"Children reported being scared and very worried by the attacks but it was interesting to find a majority of them were embarrassed that others were witnessing their [victimisation](#) as it occurred," Professor Campbell said.

She said recent Australian studies have reported traditional victimisation prevalence rates of between 16 and 40 per cent among students.

She also said a 2008 survey of about 40 countries found Australian primary schools had the highest reported incidence of bullying in the world.

She also said a review of Australian studies found a conservative prevalence estimate for being cyberbullied in a 12-month period was approximately 20 per cent of children aged between eight to 17.

The participants, involved in the latest research, were drawn from a larger case study sample of 3,112 students from across 29 different schools in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia.

She said the focus of the research was to give "voice" to students who reported being targeted by both traditional bullies and cyberbullies.

"Few studies have directly examined the perceptions of students who have experienced both forms of bullying and explored which form was

worse for them," she said.

Professor Campbell said the perceptions of the students challenged a number of suppositions presented in other literature that attempted to explain why cyberbullying was associated with more negative outcomes than traditional or face-to-face bullying.

She said many students noted that it was their ability or inability to take some form of action in response to their victimisation that was a defining reason as to why they perceived their experiences as they did.

Professor Campbell said taking action against the person who cyberbullied them took the form of deleting a message or 'blocking' a bully.

A girl, 12, said: "I was upset that the person who cyberbullied me hid behind the computer like a coward."

And a boy, 15, said: "Because being physically abused is a lot worse than being abused by a pathetic loser over the Internet."

She said other students referred to the distance created by technology and indicated that traditional bullying was worse than cyberbullying because: "It was real, live communication, not done digitally, it cuts deeper," girl, 14.

"These students specifically referred to the proximity of the bully during the incidents which suggests proximity makes it more emotionally impacting than when it is buffered by the distance that the online setting provides," Dr Campbell said.

She said the [children](#)'s reactions included feeling hurt, depressed, frightened, anxious, embarrassed and worthless.

Professor Campbell said based on these responses it appeared that when students felt significantly helpless to act in response to their victimisation, it affected their interpretation of which form of bullying was worse.

She said the study had ramifications for schools and guidance counsellors.

"It is also important to involve [students](#) and student leaders in anti-[bullying](#) programs as teachers are already dealing with a crowded curriculum," she said.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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