# Dealing with cyberbullying is everyone's responsibility

March 9 2017

Victoria University of Wellington research shows that for New Zealand to combat its high cyberbullying rates, everyone needs to take responsibility: from teachers to school management and Government organisations.

Victoria University Faculty of Education staff Professor Vanessa Green and Dr Michael Johnston worked with postgraduate students Loreto Mattioni, Tessa Prior, Susan Harcourt and Tegan Lynch, surveying teachers and school managers from around New Zealand to understand attitudes towards cyberbullying.

"We were interested in the fact that New Zealand appeared to have such a high rate of [bullying](#), despite there being a number of programmes in place. Cyberbullying is particularly controversial because there is some debate in the literature over who is responsible for addressing it," says Professor Green.

The research, conducted on a total of 888 teaching staff and senior managers from New Zealand primary, intermediate and secondary schools, showed that most staff are reluctant to take responsibility for cyberbullying because it often occurs outside of school hours.

"That itself highlights serious concerns with regard to schools' understanding of cyberbullying, its causes, and how it's perpetuated," says Professor Green.

"Often those being cyberbullied are being bullied in traditional ways, too. And as with traditional bullying it's situated in the peer group. So we need schools to understand it isn't some 'other thing'—it has the same causes and highlights a serious issue with the school climate and the peer group dynamic."

Professor Green cites the 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) bullying report that shows that even though most New Zealand students felt safe at school, they experienced bullying behaviours at school more frequently than students in many of the other participating countries. New Zealand has one of the worst rates of bullying in the world for children in year four, and has dropped to forty-sixth place out of 47 countries.

Professor Green says the research by her team shows that senior management were more likely than teachers to believe that teachers are responsible for dealing with cyberbullying outside of school. However teachers thought it was more important to prevent cyberbullying rather than having them be responsible for dealing with it.

"Despite managers wanting teachers to do more, they are not providing teachers with training to handle cyberbullying.

"The added challenge for teachers is not being privy to the students' technological sub-system. That's why cyberbullying is so effective, because it can stay out of the obvious realm of physical, tangible bullying. The reality is, you can't get rid of technology—you need to upskill teachers."

Professor Green says an interdisciplinary response is needed to overcome cyberbullying in New Zealand.

"Cyberbullying, and bullying, are not just education issues, they're

mental health and social issues as well.

"All those in an environment where cyberbullying exists need to realise what their role is in prevention and support. And encouraging and implementing antibullying programmes in all schools needs to come from a government level. I think the best programme to combat bullying of all types is KiVa—an evidence-based programme that prevents bullying and effectively tackles the cases of bullying as they arise.

"The programme is here, it's available, and there is strong evidence that it's working. For example, in Finland, while New Zealand has been doing worse in bullying prevention, Finland has placed KiVa into 97 percent of its schools and according to the TIMMS report it has improved it's placing with regard to rates of bullying.

"We're travelling in the wrong direction and have the opportunity to turn this around."

Provided by Victoria University

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