I13   Bullying and Sexting on Social Networks

Cinzia Gimelli, PsyD, PhD, Science & Method, Reggio Emilia 42124, ITALY; Luciano Garofano, PhD*, Accademia Italiana di Scienze Forensi, Parma 43100, ITALY*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have an integrative viewpoint about this complex field of cyber crime from a psychological and design perspective.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing how availability and the use of social networking sites creates both opportunities and risks for young users.

This presentation evaluates the applicability of the current legal framework to cyberbullying and sexting, two types of (potentially harmful) behavior that are increasingly occurring between peers in the social networking environment. This analysis includes a mapping of applicable legislative provisions at the European and Italian level, an analysis of the Terms of Service of the largest social networking provider, Facebook®, as well as an overview and assessment of self-regulatory initiatives that have been taken by the industry in this area in Italy. The goal is to identify several solutions for a comprehensive strategy to ensure that risks of cyberbullying and sexting are dealt with in a manner that empowers young users.

Introduction: At young ages, there is an increase in reports of intimidation, harassment, intrusion, fear, and violence experienced through Information Technologies (IT). Hacking, spamming, identity theft, child pornography, cyberbullying, and cyber stalking are just a few examples of cyber crimes. In this study, the most common types of cyber crimes, epidemiological data, and the profiles of cyber victims and aggressors are approached. The studies that identify the factors contributing to IT misuse and to growing online vulnerability, principally in adolescents, are also discussed. Likewise, the central explanatory theories for the online victimization and the risk factors for victimization and perpetration online are addressed. Some cyber crime prevention strategies are anticipated, particularly among young people, seeking to provide clues to the consolidation of recent policies, namely at the digital design level.

The new age of mobile communication brought on by the internet has meant that people now have mobile access to a wealth of information and services. Although the benefits of mobile information access are acknowledged through the empowering influence over its audience, a concern is noted with reference to largely uncensored forums offering mobile communication exchange to young generations. The proliferation of mobile technologies available, in conjunction with applications facilitating social networking, has steadily increased the attack surface minors are exposed to in an online environment. Most minors engaging in online activities do so through mobile technologies such as cell phones. This device, because of its mobility, offers access to the internet that circumvents controls of supervision.

Results: This multidisciplinary study presents an approach that offers an alternative to existing solutions, available to the commercial market, that are driven by static configurations. This newer form of communication has many benefits to adolescents and plays an important role in their social lives. Despite the numerous benefits of these technologies, there are also several potential risks that can be detrimental to the mental health and well-being of adolescents.

Conclusion: This study proposes the necessity of performing revisions in clinical psychological practices and assessments, such as in forensic and legal policies regarding bullying and cyberbullying. In addition to improving legal success, this will reduce bullying prevalence rates, psychological distress, and psychopathology that can be comorbid or emerge because of this behavior.

This proposal will benefit young generations engaging in online interactions through the implementation of proactive strategies and it is critical that child psychologists, mental health providers, and forensic experts be informed of these potential risks so that effective forms of prevention can be found to educate adolescents and their families.

Public Health, Cyberbullying, Social Networks