Research in Brief:
Effectiveness of Cyberbullying Intervention and Prevention Programs in Schools

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Background

Given the pervasiveness and accessibility of internet-ready smart devices and social media, there has been growing research interest in cyberbullying. One definition of cyberbullying incorporates three key elements occurring in the context of information and communication technologies: 1) intention to harm; 2) repetition; and 3) clear power imbalance. Riddell et al. (2018) found that at any given time, 33.7% of adolescents in Canada reported cyberbullying perpetration or victimization in the past three months.

Furthermore, many studies have demonstrated negative outcomes of cyberbullying. For instance, cyberbullies are likely to report high levels of conduct problems and hyperactivity, while cyberbullying victims are likely to report depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Given the prevalence and impacts of cyberbullying, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of current cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs for future policy and practice implications.

What is a systematic review and meta-analysis?

A systematic review is a type of study that exhaustively summarizes the literature on a specific research question. The

Why does this matter?

⇒ Cyberbullying is prevalent among adolescents and it yields negative health outcomes for both perpetrators and victims.

⇒ Research interest in cyberbullying has increased, yet there remains a lack of evidence on effective interventions to prevent and reduce cyberbullying.

⇒ Evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions is essential for future practice and policy decisions .

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purpose of a systematic review is to draw a collective conclusion that provides stronger evidence than any single study.

This research method involves: 1) framing a specific research question; 2) running a comprehensive search in the literature; 3) screening the retrieved articles for relevance; 4) assessing the research quality of the relevant articles; 5) abstracting results from the relevant articles; and 6) synthesizing the results of the relevant articles to draw a conclusion.

A meta-analysis then combines the statistical results of the relevant articles to provide a pooled estimate of effects.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate interventions aimed at preventing or reducing cyberbullying among children and adolescents aged 4-18y. Peer-reviewed studies were retrieved from electronic databases including Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, DARE, and ProQuest.

Eligible studies: 1) included an adequate definition of cyberbullying; 2) described an intervention or prevention program implemented on school-age participants; 3) included experimental and control conditions; 4) quantitatively measured cyberbullying behaviour; and 5) were published from the year 2000 onwards. Studies that included university students, juvenile delinquents, or clinical samples were excluded.

What did they learn?

From the 3994 total articles retrieved, 24 studies fit all eligibility criteria and were included in the final review. Eighteen of these studies were included in the meta-analysis for cyberbullying perpetration and nineteen were included in the meta-analysis of cyberbullying victimization. There was a combined total of approximately 37,000 participants in these studies with ages ranging from 11-19 years old.

Overall, it was found that Individuals receiving the cyberbullying intervention programs were less likely to report engaging in cyberbullying perpetration and to experience cyberbullying victimization in comparison to control participants not receiving the programs. Anti-cyberbullying programs reduced cyberbullying perpetration by 10-15% and cyberbullying victimization by about 14%.

A limitation of this study is that specific intervention components have yet to be evaluated. Cyberbullying intervention strategies used in the studies included support groups, peer mediation programs, empathy training programs, social and emotional skill development programs, parent and teacher training programs, and educational campaigns. While successful interventions reflected some of these components, we do not know which ones were most effective.

Results should be interpreted with caution due to high heterogeneity in the outcomes across included studies. The authors conclude that though cyberbullying interventions seem promising, further research is required to identify specific intervention components that are best for targeting cyberbullying perpetration and victimization.

This review was prepared from: *Gaffney, H., Farrington, D. P., Espelage, D. L., & Ttofi, M. M. (2018). Are cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs effective? A systematic and meta-analytical review. Aggression and Violent Behavior.*

Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.