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CYBER bullying in schools should be labelled "cyber assault" so students understand the severity of the issue, the head of the state's key parent body says.

South Australian Association of State School Organisations (SAASSO) president Diana Manolas said branding incidents of taunting, threatening and abusive comments made on social networking websites and via mobile phones as bullying was not serious enough.

"Calling it 'bullying' makes it sound like a childish prank; it has escalated far beyond this - it should be termed cyber assault," Ms Manolas, a parent of two, said.

"It is psychological and emotional abuse with the potential to inflict lifelong damage to our children."

Responses from an independent panel, co-ordinated by *The Advertiser*, have shown parents, students, teachers, counsellors and cyber behaviour experts all believe cyber bullying is an escalating issue that will take a joint approach to stamp out.

Much of the fear generated by cyber bullying is in the unknown. Experts have said many adults are unfamiliar with the technology used by adolescents. Meanwhile adolescents are unaware of online dangers and what is appropriate behaviour in the cyber world.

UniSA senior lecturer in education Dr Barbara Spears said the wellbeing of children was being compromised by the transportable nature of technology.

"The computer is in the pockets of our young people, and anyone, anywhere can visit a website and log something inappropriate or post an anonymous message," Dr Spears said.

Even authorities are slipping behind. There are no laws against cyber bullying but some online behaviour steps into illegal territory through racial vilification, menacing, stalking or impersonation. However it can be difficult to monitor.

Detective Sergeant Sonia Kelsey of the electronic crime



CONCERNED: Wilderness School students Kate and Megan use Facebook to communicate with friends.

Picture: DEAN MARTIN

sector said legislation was falling behind the evolution of technology and new avenues of protection and disciplinary action could be explored. "Legislation does have a bit of catching up to do," Det. Kelsey said.

Few incidents of cyber bullying in schools are officially reported to police.

Instead, many school leaders handle the problem in-house or turn to district stations for advice on how to handle specific situations. Meanwhile, the e-crime department has ramped up its

education sessions for students, parents and staff.

Prevention has been seen as the key and education researchers have suggested incorporating young people in planning the strategies to stamp out this societal evil.

NATIONAL research shows that up to one-in-three teenagers are victims of cyber bullying and it is increasing. Research cited by the Australian Federal Police found 31 per cent of 14 to 17-year-olds reported they had been cyber bullied.

The 2008 Microsoft/Gal-

axy survey also found 21 per cent of 10 to 13-year-olds had experienced cyber bullying.

Wilderness Year 9 student Kate said she was concerned that cyber bullying was "popular" and that comments made online or via mobile could be easily misunderstood. "Cyber bullying makes them feel worthless and confused and makes them feel like they can't trust anyone," she said.

At a world-first research conference in Melbourne last month, supported by the European Co-operation in Sci-

ence and Technology (COST), members of the education sector examined the issue with young people.

The source of cyber bullying and remedies were discussed with the conclusions potentially spurring future research and international policies regarding online behaviour.

It was the first time cyber bullying had been targeted on a united, international front, highlighting it as a global problem that knows no bounds. "The young people who spoke with us (at the

COST Research School) told us that they wanted to have a voice in the education of adults," Dr Spears said.

Failing to act on this issue could be fatal.

SA child psychologist Simon Andrews said at its worst, ongoing bullying could lead to suicidal thoughts, plans or completion. More commonly, Mr Andrews said young people affected by cyber bullying experienced the traditional signs of stress and anxiety.

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The Advertiser **Sunday Mail**



Dr Rob Cover

Lecturer in Media, School of Humanities, University of Adelaide

A powerful medium, used and abused: One concern is the impact it has on people on an even more frequent basis than, say, playground or face-to-face workplace bullying. (Another) concern is what cyberbullying does to the reputation of digital, online media. Much like pornography, online identity fraud and surveillance issues, it casts a very negative shadow over all the creative,

collaborative, information and entertainment pleasures of the internet. The fact is that cyberbullying can be more persistent, appears "published" rather than merely physical or verbal. It can make use of the victim's own information or creativity to humiliate, which increases the emotional harm that it can do.

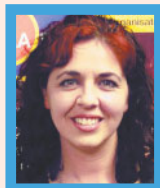


Liz Mead

Principal, Aberfoyle Park High School

It's everyone's responsibility to stop cyber bullying: We all have a responsibility to help educate and protect young people from all forms of bullying and that includes all e-communication issues not just cyber bullying. By "we" I mean schools, parents, caregivers, governments, extended families, the media and

other relevant agencies need to work together to develop programs. Policies and information are needed to educate young people on the benefits and dangers of the e-environment. I believe that the more informed a young person is, the more likely we are to curtail cyber bullying and other inappropriate e-communication.



Diana Manolas

Parent to Olivia, 12, and Renee, 15; President of the South Australian Association of State School Organisations (SAASSO)

The danger remains in the unknowns of cyber bullying: As a parent and as a tutor, I fear cyber bullying threatens to eclipse other forms of abuse in the breadth and depth of its damage to our children. It can twist and sneak into my home and strike at my children, leaving no physical trace... and there is little I can do to prevent it. Calling it "bullying" makes it sound like a childish prank. It has escalated far beyond this – it should be termed Cyber Assault. It is psychological and emotional abuse with the potential to inflict lifelong damage

to our children. It is an absolute certainty that cyber bullying is under-reported and the severity of its effect on our children is under-acknowledged. Time to get tough on cyber bullies. We must stop it by taking a zero-tolerance attitude toward the perpetrators. This may sound harsh but we aren't talking about mere teasing. This is abuse and we must treat it as such. Harsher penalties like mandatory suspensions from school and automatic filing of police reports are already being employed by some schools.



Megan Meredith

Year 12 student, Wilderness School

Ongoing education is the best offence: At my school, as soon as students start to learn about computers and how to explore the internet, they are taught the correct and appropriate way to utilise this knowledge. Furthermore, as they progress to middle school, every year a cyber bullying awareness program is run, showing the impact that cyber

bullying can have on someone's life and how there can be severe consequences for being a cyber bully. I think that cyber bullying can be stopped, or at least minimised, if education at all schools on what it is and the impact that cyber bullying can have is advertised. Also that the consequences of cyber bullying should be well-known.



Dr Barbara Spears

Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of South Australia

Cyber bullying occurs 24 hours a day, seven days a week: It is not two individuals having an online fight. It is where there is a power imbalance and the target feels helpless or powerless to respond. I think that we need to educate young people and their parents that this is an insidious form of bullying, that occurs 24/7, is supported by anonymity and because of the nature of cyberspace, will remain

in a digitised form that can be accessed indefinitely: what goes online, stays online. If we want to know how it affects young people, then we really have to ask them, and listen to them: they are the experts in their own lives. We are constantly viewing cyberbullying through an adult lens: we need to ask young people to help us see it from their perspective. Flicking the power switch is not enough to stop the problem.

What police say

Cyber bullying is bullying which uses e-technology as a means of victimising others. It is the use of an internet service of mobile technologies – such as email, chat rooms, discussion groups, instant messaging, webpages or SMS (text messaging) – with the intention of harming another person.

Cyber bullying can be an e-crime, a fact not often clearly understood by those involved.

Examples from the South Australian Police of e-crime:

SEXTING: With my mobile phone I took a photo of my girlfriend naked and sent it to everyone. **Offence:** Production or dissemination of child pornography. **Maximum penalty:** 10 years jail.

IMPERSONATION: I got into their email account and sent abusive emails to everyone. **Offence:** Unlawful operation of a computer system. **Maximum penalty:** 6 months jail or \$2500 fine.

INTIMIDATION: He told me if I didn't do what he said he would put that photo on the internet and tell all my friends. **Offence:** Blackmail. **Maximum penalty:** 15 years jail.

HARASSMENT: I created a website about X and we all put stuff on there about how much they and everyone else like them are hated. **Offence:** Racial vilification. **Maximum penalty:** \$5000 fine, 3 years jail or both.

OTHER OFFENCES USING INTERNET OR MOBILE PHONE CARRIERS: for suicide-related material (\$100,000 fine), to make a threat (7 years jail), to menace, harass or cause offence (3 years jail).

Source: Cyber bullying, e-crime and the protection of children and young people (compiled by SA Government, Association of Independent Schools and Catholic Education).

Incidents

A SOUTHERN suburbs Adelaide high school suspended two students and issued warnings to dozens more regarding "sexually harassing" and derogatory comments made toward teachers on a Facebook group. Letters were also sent to the families of former students who contributed to the site.

ELEVEN high school students in Perth were suspended after a Facebook site was created to verbally attack and cyber-bully an experienced but unpopular teacher.

RIVALRY between two elite Brisbane boys' schools came to a head after ongoing Facebook taunts resulted in the violent assault of a student.

A STUDENT in regional Victoria was suspended for falsely accusing a teacher of being a gay paedophile on Facebook.

A GIRL'S school in Sydney north called on police to assist with the management of "several episodes of ongoing harassment" via Facebook and text messaging.

PARRAMATTA high school students were punished for posting racist comments about Aboriginals on Facebook.

IN THE United States, harmful comments and bullying occurring on Formspring have been blamed for the suicide of a young college graduate.

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