

Cyberbullying definition and measurement issues **– a systematic review of assessment instruments** **Ann Frisé**

Ann Frisé starts her lecture speaking of the COST IS0801 *Cyberbullying: Coping with negative and enhancing positive uses of new technologies, in relationships in educational settings*. COST is an organization that enables the coordination of nationally-funded research on a European level. One working sub-group of the COST IS080 on cyberbullying was dedicated to a study of already existing measures for the assessment of cyberbullying through a systematic review. She was part of this working sub-group and the focus on this lecture is to present the systematic review.

The systematic review started out with a literature search for publications published prior to October 2010. This generated 636 citations, of which 61 were relevant, resulting in 44 instruments.

Validity and reliability. One aim of the systematic review was to investigate the validity and reliability of the instruments. Most of the instruments had limited reports of reliability and validity testing. Actually, only internal reliability (internal consistency) and convergent validity were tested in about half of the instruments.

Terms and definition. The working group also investigated what terms were used and how cyberbullying was defined in the instruments. When measuring offline bullying the participants are often given a definition of offline bullying before answering the questions. It is common to use the definition by Olweus (1999): “Bullying is an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself”. This definition includes three criteria: intentionality, repetition and imbalance of power. Researchers in the cyberbullying field operationalize the definition of cyberbullying in different ways. More specifically, the definitions in most instruments included the criterion that the perpetrator must have the intention to harm. But it was rare that the criterion repetition was included in the instruments’ definitions. Notably, few of the instruments’ definitions contained the criterion imbalance of power. Almost half of the instruments included in the review did not explicitly use the term cyberbullying. The concepts measured by the instruments range from internet harassment behavior to electronic bullying behavior to cyberbullying

Cut-offs and reference periods. Another important issue was to investigate the cut-offs and reference periods used to measure the prevalence of cyberbullying. The reference period “the past couple of months” and the cut-off point “two or three times per month” have been widely used when measuring offline bullying. Researchers in the cyberbullying field use different cut-offs and reference periods. However, the two most often used cut-off points in the instrument were “at least once” or “yes”. The two most often included reference periods in the instruments were “last year” and “ever”.

How common is cyberbullying? The working group also examined the prevalence of cyberbullying in the studies. Prevalence rates for cybervictims varied between 0.9% and 73%.

At the end of her talk Ann Frisé makes the conclusion that prevalence rates vary greatly, possibly due to different concepts, definitions, cut-offs and reference periods when measuring the prevalence of cyberbullying. Thus, in order to move this area of research forward it might be beneficial to focus on reaching agreements among researchers about which concepts, definitions, cut-offs, and reference periods to use. Ann Frisé also stressed that the systematic review reveals a need for investigating the validity and reliability of most of the existing instruments.