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The New Abuse of the Modern World

Bullying has been around since the beginning of time. These days, however, bullying isn’t just happening on the playground or at the bus stop, it’s happening on the Internet and on juveniles cell phones, making it possible to bully anyone twenty four hours a day. Cyberbullying follows juveniles around the clock, and into the safety of their homes. A recent study examined students reporting being cyberbullied. “Approximately 71.9 percent reported being cyber bullied once or twice in the school year. 19.6 percent reported once or twice a month. 5.3 percent reported once or twice a week. Also, 3.1 percent reported almost every day.” (“Megan Meir Foundation”). These statistics indicate the severity of cyberbullying happening because the improvement of technology. Due to this, cyberbullying is extremely dangerous to human health, debilitating to human life and destructive towards education. It is time that the federal government take action and makes stricter laws against cyberbullying.

First and foremost, cyberbullying is a danger towards the mental health of anyone who is a victim of this crime. Every individual should aspire to having good mental health, which includes coping, resilience and good judgment. Cyberbullying, however, may lead to a bad mental health and may lead to mental disorders such as depression. Manuel Gamez-Guadix, Ph.D. of the University of Deusto in Spain says that “A number of adolescents are both victims of cyberbullying and perpetrators of cyberbullying, but victims are at higher risk for psychological and behavioral health problems” (Cyberbullying Puts Teens at Risk). This means that it puts juveniles at risk for depression and anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints. “Fewer than half of the 15 million children and teens with psychiatric disorders in this country ever receive clinical attention, and while approximately one in five teens experiences depression before adulthood, less than 33 percent of depressed teens ever get treatment (“Psychiatric Issues”). The reason why cyber victims develop these mental disorders is because they are humiliated by what was shared through electronic technology. Thus, making stricter laws against cyberbullying will help prevent mental disorders from developing.

Cyberbullying is also a danger towards the physical health of anyone who is a victim of cyberbullying. Just as every individual needs good mental health, they must also have good physical health. Sometimes juveniles who experience cyberbullying get so upset that they harm themselves. These actions interfere with their physical health because they are injuring body tissues. For example, Carney Barner started to slit his wrists at the age of 14 when he received rude messages by an anonymous cyberbully on Facebook. At first he thought it was a joke until the messages kept getting more abusive. With the abusive messages he received, he says “It started eating into my self-confidence, it all started going downhill” It turned out his cyberbully was someone he regarded to as a friend (Cyberbullying Led to Self Harm”). Of course, making stricter laws against cyberbullying would help prevent self-harming from emerging.

Lastly, cyberbullying is also a danger towards the substance abuse of anyone who is a victim of cyberbullying. Juveniles turn to alcohol and other drugs as a way to self-medicate and cope with their emotions. In the past month, “40 percent of high school seniors reported drinking some alcohol, almost 15 percent of adolescents abused marijuana, and 13 percent of adolescents reported smoking cigarettes (“Substance Abuse”). Compared to juveniles who aren’t cyber bullied, juveniles who have been cyber bullied are more than twice as likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. Hence, making stricter laws against cyberbullying will help prevent the abusing of drug substances.

Above all, cyberbullying is a danger towards the poor academic achievement of anyone who is a victim of this crime. Research in Virginia shows that [high school campuses with more reported bullying](http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/pdf/Lacey_The%20Impact%20of%20Bullying%20Climate%20-%20APA%202011%20Poster.pdf) had lower passing rates on Virginia’s standardized tests. Dewey Cornell, a professor at the University of Virginia says “it reduced the level of academic engagement and involvement in student activities among students as whole” (“Lower School Achievement”). Schools with high levels of reported bullying had lower passing rates by an average of 3 to 6 percent across tests when compared to schools with less reported bullying. It is undeniable that making stricter laws against cyberbullying would prohibit low achievement of anyone who is a victim.

Cyberbullying is also a danger towards the excessive absences of anyone who is a victim of cyberbullying. Cyber victims often have much higher rates of absences at school than non-bullied juveniles. 15 percent of all school absenteeism is related to fears of being bullied at school. (3) In many cases this is because the person or persons bullying them are classmates. However, even if the cyberbully doesn’t attend their school, they still may feel embarrassed about classmates seeing what the cyberbully posted online. Skipping school or cutting classes worsens grades because it becomes hard to study due to anxiety and stress. Certainly, making stricter laws against cyberbullying will avoid these excessive absences.

Lastly, cyberbullying is a cause of dropouts. No juvenile makes a sudden decision to leave school unless it’s a real reason. Instead, it's several factors that build over time, resulting in the decision to drop out of school. The dropout rate in New York City is already 40%. For many, cyberbullying plays a big role in this decision. Cyberbullying is pushing this percentage to go up. In some cases, juveniles will either drop out of school or lose interest in continuing their education after high school due to cyberbullying. In the long run this affects their future in getting a job because it is difficult to get a job without a high school diploma. Obviously, making stricter laws against cyberbullying would help prevent these dropouts from occurring.

The third reason why the United States federal government should make stricter laws against cyberbullying is to prevent suicide. Suicide becomes an answer because a cyber-victim can’t take the pain anymore from being humiliated through electronic technology. For example, Hannah Smith, the 14 year old from Leicestershire, England, hung herself on August 2, 2013 after being cyber bullied for months on a social network, ask.fm. Ask.fm allows users to send messages anonymously. At least five teenagers have now killed themselves in the past year after experiencing abuse on this website including Hannah Smith (Cyberbullying on Social Networks). As a result, juveniles like Hannah Smith begin to fantasize about ending their life in order to escape their tormentors for good. Admittedly, making stricter laws against cyberbullying would help prevent these suicides, and save lives.

Another example in which cyberbullying led to suicide is the Tyler Clementi case. It was during the summer after his high school graduation that 18 year old Tyler Clementi began sharing about his sexual orientation. Clementi's roommate during his freshman year at Rutgers University, Dharun Ravi, used a webcam in September 2010 to stream footage of Clementi kissing another man. Due to Ravi’s actions, on September 22, 2010, Clementi committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. (11) Authentically, making stricter laws against cyberbullying would help prevent cyberbullying and hate crimes against sexual orientation.

Lastly, another example in which cyberbullying led to suicide is the Amanda Todd case. Amanda began using video chat since the seventh grade to meet people online, and one stranger convinced Amanda to send him a topless photograph. When the stranger received Amanda’s photo he attempted to use it to blackmail Amanda, and the picture began flowing on the internet, including a Facebook profile that used the topless photograph as the profile image. (9) She attempted suicide by drinking bleach but doctors saved her by pumping her stomach. The second time she was found dead in her home. With this case, obviously making stricter laws against cyberbullying would help prevent sexual exploitation and cyberbullying.

Juveniles spend a lot of time on the internet every day. They use the internet to talk to friends, gather information for an essay, check sports scores, and practice their own social skills on a larger population. While cyber bullies have picked on victims for generations, cyberbullying has become extremely dangerous due to the outcome effects. It has been linked to physical and mental health, substance abuse, low academic achievement, and suicide. Juveniles being wicked and heartless is unfortunately never going to change which is why the federal government should make a first move for some change because they have the power to enact laws banning cyberbullying and as a nation we are ready to take responsible action.