



Module 1 - What is cyberbullying

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Module 1- What is cyberbullying?

Introduction to the module

Over 40 years have passed since the phenomena of peer bullying in the school setting started to be investigated. During this time, awareness of this violent conduct has grown, and numerous intervention programs have been created in the school setting to both prevent and address this type of behavior. New types of aggressiveness against peers and new forms of bullying have emerged concurrently with this evolution in research on bullying. The methods that perpetrators bully and abuse victims have also changed. Cyberbullying is one of them; it involves using modern information and communication tools, mostly the Internet and mobile phones, to harass and bully peers.

While there is a vast amount of research on the subject in schools, with professionals and areas of intervention or specific programs, it is necessary to look at what specific needs may exist in vocational education and how teachers can deal with this phenomenon specifically with the students who are being bullied.

Objective of the module

On successful completing of this module, VET teachers will be able to:

- Know the basic characteristics of cyberbullying and how it is different from traditional bullying
- Know the types and the different behaviors that are framed within this concept
- Be aware of how different groups of people can be specifically affected by this phenomenon
- Know some data about the prevalence of this phenomenon in different EU countries
- Know the results of specific studies that gather the causes and results of cyberbullying and outline suggestions for its approach

Description of the module

Content / Activity	Method / Advice / Tips	Training Equipment / Materials / Tools	Timing
1.1 What is cyberbullying? - Looking at the different definitions of cyberbullying and	This is purely a theoretical module so its implementation should be mainly based on presentation of	Computer Projector Flipchart Post-its	15-20 minutes for each of the 5 sections.

<p>drawing the common definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the exclusive language and means that operate when cyberbullying happens <p>1.2 What types of cyberbullying exist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Types of behaviors that fall under the category of <i>cyberbullying</i> - Groups that can be more affected by this harassment <p>1.3 Statistics on the phenomenon in Europe and partner countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data on cyberbullying prevalence in EU countries - Brief and specific data on the phenomenon in partner countries <p>1.4 Cyberbullying in the VET classroom: cases and examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collected information about research made on both students and teachers about reasons and results of cyberbullying 	<p>content and data. To do this a visual presentation (PTT) is always recommended for more engagement.</p> <p>Before the beginning of each section, a brainstorming session can be done to warm up and to see what the level of knowledge is between the VET educators. These are some questions that can be raised to foster participation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you define cyberbullying? - How is it different from traditional bullying? - What types of cyberbullying do you know? Are you aware of any of these practices happening in your classroom? If yes, how have you dealt with it? - Why do you think certain groups of people are more likely to suffer cyberbullying? - Do you know how is the situation in your country? 		
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<p>1.5 Good practices</p> <p>- Suggestions drawn from studies on how to prevent/deal with this phenomenon</p>	<p>- What strategies have you (or your VET center) implemented to tackle this problem? (if any)</p>		
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1.1 What is cyberbullying?

According to UNICEF, cyberbullying is any type of bullying happening with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging, gaming platforms and mobile phones. This is a phenomenon that happens repeatedly over time, with the aim of scaring, angering or shaming the victim. Cyberbullying is a manifestation of cowardly abuse that has evolved from traditional bullying with the arrival of the internet, ICT and their use by minors (which each year is happening at an increasingly younger age due to the acquisition of smartphones). According to Christine Kormann, Director of the European Commission's Information Society, cyberbullying is the biggest problem currently evident among the range of obnoxious or risky behaviours of adolescents in electronic contexts.

This type of harassment has its own characteristic and exclusive language and means:

- It is immediate
- It has a generalized extension
- It grants anonymity, in some cases, which enhances the sense of impunity
- Pressure on the victim can be applied at any time of the day
- Harassment is more systematic and continuous

Cyberbullying is a situation of violence and mistreatment between peers that can have both short-term and long-term consequences. Attacks can happen at any time and place, and the victims do not know who the attacker is, which causes a bigger sensation of abandonment than in traditional bullying. Both types of bullying can be combined, or one can be the consequence of the other, although it is not necessarily always like this.

1.2 What types of cyberbullying exist?

Carrying out certain harassment and bullying behaviors through digital methods can in some cases, without this being the intention, even lead to criminal behavior. The reach and impact achieved through electronic media has led to an enormous increase in practices that involve an invasion of the privacy of others. In many of these cases, the person who engages in these practices is not aware of the damage that this can cause, although in many other cases they are. Among the types of harassment and behaviors that fall within the scope of cyberbullying, we can highlight the following:

- Harassment. This consists of constantly sending messages, images or videos to the victim, insulting, abusing or humiliating them, with the intention that more and more people will join in the practice and the dissemination of this humiliating content. Within this concept we can also include threats, blackmail and defamation.
- Crimes against privacy. Disseminating personal data and confidential or intimate information is a much easier practice to carry out over the Internet. Within this phenomenon there are many others: impersonating another person in order to damage their image, extorting someone by threatening to publish sensitive content -usually sexual content- or obtaining personal information from the person in order to then take this harassment from the virtual world to the real world.
- Sexual harassment on the Internet or *grooming*. The term "grooming" describes intentional activities made by an adult to get close to and emotionally control a child, a teen or a vulnerable adult in order to pave the way for sexual abuse. It involves instances of consenting to sexual content that is explicit or implicit.

Cyberbullying can be conducted publicly or privately. Some victims can receive private messages or they can be insulted or humiliated in a public post on social media, although the first way is more common, because as previously mentioned, anonymity provides more protection to the perpetrator thereby lessening any potential consequences such as judicial punishment.

When talking about the different types of bullying, we also need to take into account how specific groups of people can be affected differently by bullying. For example, cyberbullying has a strong gendered perspective. A study conducted by Isabel Tajahuerce showed how cyberbullying cases against girls and women tend to be about blackmailing with sexually-related threats of releasing intimate photographic content. Some threads about spreading rumors can be also framed around gendered violence or violence against LGBTQ+ people. Being a LGBTQ person can increase the possibility that you will be a victim of bullying. In the case of transgender students, survey data was unavailable due to the small size of samples. If Trans people are already more exposed in their daily lives to more violence (and a very specific forms of violence) because of their sexual orientation, on the Internet the ways and forms increase. We have to understand that, with different minority groups (LGBTQ people, migrants or people with

disabilities) violence will always be specific and targeted, just as with women sexual harassment predominates in the instances of bully. These realities need to be addressed and understood in order to address the specific issues they face. Although technologies are not the source of violence, it is important to understand how they operate and what is their role in the way they frame and shape the relation between victims, victimizers and witnesses.

1.3 Statistics on the phenomenon in Europe and partner countries

Based on the Meta-Analysis published on the International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health (2022), which gathers data from studies from 2012 to 2022, we can extract the following relevant data at European level, paying special attention to partner countries of the STANDUP project:

- Regarding cybervictimization prevalence studied among 19 different EU countries, the highest number was found in Poland (31,5%), whereas in Greece and Spain the percentages are lower (5.2% and 5%, respectively).
- Regarding prevalence evolution, in Spain it raised from 10% to 15% between 2010 and 2015; in Czech Republic it doubled between 2010 and 2018 (18.6%); whereas in Finland it increased from 9% to 11% between 2009 and 2015.
- In Spain, prevalence rose with age, rising from 8% in the 9-10-year-old age group to 15% in the 15-16-year-old age group.

Between the common findings and most relevant one of the studies analyzed, we can highlight that: more girls than boys were found to be at a higher risk of suffering this form of violence; both cyber-victims and cyber-perpetrators are related to “low self-control” or “externalizing behaviors”; and group membership characteristics were found to be a relevant reason for discrimination.

In Spain, data provided by Save the Children (2016) and UNICEF (2017) shows that more girls than boys were recognized to suffer more cyberbullying or that the total percentage of victims increases as they reach adolescence. 42,6% of girls and 35,9% of boys claimed to have suffered some form of sexual violence or harassment online. The ANAR foundation states that when the victim of CB is female, in 42,1% of cases the victimizers are female, in 30,3% of cases the perpetrators are male and in the 27,6% of cases they are mixed. When the victim of cyberbullying is male, the 73,3% cases had male victimizers, 23,3% of cases had mixed victimizers and just the 3,3% of the cases imply only female victimizer. The report states that in cyberbullying cases, they were caused

by the aggressiveness of bullies (25% of cases), physical characteristics of the victim (23,6%), revenge (19,4%), being different (9,7%) or hobbies (6,9%).

In Greece, according to the study carried out by the University of Western Macedonia (2020), it has been found that this type of bullying happens rarely compared to traditional bullying. Also, it was noted, again, that girls are likely to be more vulnerable to this type of bullying, and also a correlation was found between cyberbullying victims and family relations.

In Poland, following the study by School Mental Health (2021), 5.2% of students reported cyber-perpetration, 12.9% reported cybervictimization and 15.2% reported being cyberbully/victims. Reviews of anti-bullying and cyberbullying programs in Polish schools showed that they are not sufficient and more programs are needed.

In Ireland, children suffering from cyberbullying are among the highest in the EU (Bowers, 2020), with the 28% of children having reported to have been victims. Also, half of the children surveyed were aware of, and witnessed acts of cyberbullying.

In this sense, a mention has to be made to passive viewers, who usually have an active role in bullying processes. If we want to make a proper tool for working on cyberbullying, we should consider viewers as actants. A passive viewer can become a future victimizer and can legitimize their actions to maintain their behavior and make the victims feel more isolated. Viewers can have an active role to. They can react with comments and reactions to cyberbullying related posts on social media, with the power of endorsing or diminishing it.

1.4 Cyberbullying in the VET classroom: cases and examples

A study (Nartgün and Cicioğlu, 2015) carried out among 563 VET students in Bolu province (Turkey) looked at the relationship between these students and problematic use of Internet and cyberbullying behaviors. It was found that an excessive amount of time spent by students on the Internet was linked to increasing problematic behaviors online, and there to potential cyberbullying practices. Specifically, more problematic behaviors were found when these students spent more than 6 hours online a day.

Another study published in the journal *Medicine* (2021) looked at cyberbullying factors in vocational students in an ethnic minority area of China, and how minor communities and cyberbullying are related by personal, familiar and school environmental factors. Among the elements that were studied to be considered as contributing factors to instances of cyberbullying among VET students, class climate and cybersecurity



education were two school-level variables linked to cyberbullying perpetration. It was also discovered that perceived support in the school environment was crucial. This result is in line with past studies that demonstrated a connection between teenage bullying behavior and a negative perception of the learning environment. There is an association between a positive teaching environment and a reduction in cyberbullying. Cordial relationships and interactions with peers and teachers help children feel less isolated, and this fosters a sense of connection because students see that organizations and teachers care about them. By boosting kids' socioemotional abilities and lowering violence, this supports their mental health.

In another study done by the University of Granada (2022) teachers from university, high school, school and VET education centers were surveyed about the different causal reasons of the cyberbullying phenomenon. Among all the causes that explain the existence of this online harassment, the most common ones were: blaming the aggressor (42%), the characteristics of the aggressor (24.3%), the passivity of bystanders (22.9%) and the power imbalance between aggressors and victims (20.3%).

1.5 Good practice

Taking into account the previously mentioned studies, we can extract some recommendations based on their results, respectively. In those results, the authors suggest some practices that can be undertaken to improve the different situations analyzed. From the Turkish research, it was concluded that the actions to be undertaken include: informing vocational school students, educators and parents about problematic internet use and cyberbullying; preparation of group and individualized counselling and workshops on problematic internet use and cyberbullying; activities to increase people's awareness on this issue; parents can design a customized program for their kids to control their internet use by starting to monitor their children's proper and efficient internet use at a younger age.

On this last point, similar conclusions were drawn from the study carried out in China. The authors noted that “parental care reduced the probability of victimization”. That is why interventions seeking to encourage steps to counteract cyberbullying should include education that deepens understanding of adaptive parenting with a focus on parental warmth and communication as a protective approach to facilitate positive cyber-related communication.

From the study conducted by the University of Granada, the authors focus their suggestions on improving the competences of educators at levels of educations. They mention that teachers need to be capable of handling problems that are not just technical but also pertain to their competency profile. More specifically, since kids and adolescents are their primary beneficiaries, teachers need to adapt their competencies

to the complexity of the current social context as well as to those of the students. The prevention of negative behaviors in the classroom is one of the teacher-training tactics for the prevention of cyberbullying.

Test

1. Which of the following characteristics is specific to cyberbullying:

- a) It humiliates the victim
- b) The bully can be totally anonymous**
- c) It is addressed to specific minorities
- d) It is mainly based on sexual threats

2. Disseminating personal data, confidential or intimate information can be done easily offline and online

True

False

3. Put the sentences in the correct order

A passive viewer can become a future victimizer and can make feel victimizers

The term "grooming" describes intentional activities made by an adult to get close to

Teachers need to be capable of handling problems that are not just technical

legitimated to maintain their behavior and make the victims feel more isolated.

and emotionally control a child or someone who acts like a child in order to pave the way for sexual abuse.

but also pertain to their competency profile

Correct answer:

A passive viewer can become a future victimizer and can make feel victimizers legitimated to maintain their behavior and make the victims feel more isolated.

The term "grooming" describes intentional activities made by an adult to get close to and emotionally control a child or someone who acts like a child in order to pave the way for sexual abuse.

Teachers need to be capable of handling problems that are not just technical but also pertain to their competency profile

4. The most mentioned reason for cyberbullying given by the educators surveyed by the University of Granada was:

- a) the power imbalance between aggressors and victims
- b) the passivity of bystanders
- c) characteristics of the aggressor
- d) **blaming the aggressor**

5. According to the study made in Turkey, how many hours spent on the Internet were specially related to a more problematic online behavior?

- a) 5 hours
- b) **6 hours**
- c) 7 hours
- d) 8 hours

Sources

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STANDUP

Fighting Cyberbullying

Fighting cyberbullying by identifying it in the VET classroom

(2021-1-ES01-KA220-VET-000034210)



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