TOOL – CYBERHARASSMENT

SAFETY > 4.3 PROTECTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

TARGET GROUP	AGE GROUP	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	FORMAT	COPYRIGHT	LANGUAGE
Facilitators	N/A	Level 1	Preparatory guide	Creative Commons (BY-SA)	English, French

This document contains background information for facilitators before they run the workshop with participants. It describes different kinds of online behaviour that may be tantamount to cyberbullying and how to prevent them.

General Objective	Awareness building
Preparation time for facilitator	less than 1 hour
Competence area	4 - Safety
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Resource originally created in	French

WORKSHOP DIRECTIONS

1 Harassment

Definition:

Anne Bilheran, a French psychologist and specialist in harassment and the psychology of power, gives this definition:

Harassment aims at the **progressive destruction** *of an individual or of a group by another individual or group, through the* **means of repeated pressure** *meant to coerce something against the individual's will and, through this, stimulates and maintains a* **state of terror** *in that individual.*

Harassment can take two forms:

- Either **physical**, in which case the victim is physically assaulted.
- Or **moral**, relating to **verbal (or non-verbal) assault**, aiming not to affect the victim's physical integrity but goes for the same objective in psychological compromise for the ultimate aim of control.

No form of harassment is more tolerable than another! Both moral and physical bullying aim at the victim's psychological destruction.

Where does it happen?

Harassment is a social phenomenon. It is a form of violence which can seep into all interactions with another person or group. We can therefore be the victim of harassment within our **private circle** (within romantic or family relationships for example), **at school**, **university** or **at work**.

- In the private sphere: harassment here is perpetrated by someone the victim trusts (family member, romantic partner)
- Harassment at school: video explanation / academic study on the subject
- Harassment at work: video explanation

2 What is cyberharassment?

A definition :

> *Cyberharassment* involves the use of ICT to intentionally humiliate, annoy, attack, threaten, alarm, offend and/or verbally abuse individuals. Only one incident is needed for cyberharassment to occur; however, it can involve more than one incident. Cyberharassment may also involve targeted harassment, where one or more persons work together to repeatedly harass their target online over a finite period of time (often a brief period of time) to cause distress, humiliation, and/or to silence the target.
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Things to retain*:*

When harassment happens on digital platforms (social media, forums, online video games, instant messaging service, etc), this is cyberharassment.

This can happen via comments, videos, images, private messages, etc.

Online harassment is illegal whether it takes place publicly (on a form for example) or in private (between 'friends' on a social network).

It can take several forms:

- Insulting, mocking, threatening messages
- Doxxing, or sharing private information publicly without consent
- Identity theft
- Spreading false rumours
- etc.

Here's a video on the subject.

3 Forms of cyberharassment

Here are some common forms of cyberharassment:

Identity theft: when someone uses your identity to commit malevolent acts or to hurt your reputation.

Doxxing: revealing someone's personal information. Someone's identity may include a username, photos, a video etc. Revealed information could be: real name, home address, national registration number, bank account details, etc. Essentially: personal data made public online.

Swatting: Prank calls calling the police while remaining anonymous. These aim to have the police believe there's an urgent issue to address, usually at an individual's home. The goal is to humiliate that person. Brief video explanation.

Hate speech: threatening messages, insults via private messaging, inciting public hatred and harassment.

Revenge porn: Distribution of humiliating photos and videos with the aim of embarrassing. Women are usually the victims of this form of harassment.

Defamation: Spreading rumours online

And more:

- Creating a group, a page, or a false profile with the objective of harming someone's reputation
- Ordering goods/services online for the victim using their personal data

...

The most important thing to remember: **the victim is not at fault**.

It often happens that victims of cyberharassment hear 'yeah, but did you post that photo?' or 'you were asking for it with your comment'. We should encourage victims to surround themselves with people who understand their situation and not people who tend towards victim-blaming.

Here is a video on forms of cyberbullying.

4 Bullies and victims

To understand the dynamic of cyberbullying, it's important to define the different roles that tend to be involved: the harasser, the victim and the witnesses.

- The harasser is the one who disturbs a victim repeatedly. They can often work in groups.
- The victim is the target of the harasser or group of harassers.
- Witnesses are the various people who see the abusive acts that take place. These could be people who support the victim or the harasser, or people who are aware of what's going on but play no part (displaying passive behaviour).

The psychology of harassers

As cyberharassment is a relatively recent phenomenon, only a handful of researchers has seriously explored the social and psychological question regarding why certain people choose to bully, disturb and intimidate others online.

Byongook Moon and Leanne Alarid, two criminological researchers in the US, have based their work on the theory of low self-control to construct the harasser's profile.

The theory of low self-control involves six personality traits:

1. Impulsiveness
2. Lack of empathy
3. Preference for simple and easy tasks (at least in the case of harassment 'in real life' (IRL))
4. Lack of lucidity
5. Tendency to take risks
6. Non-verbal oriented communication

The harasser tends to be popular and have a large peer group, equal to or more than others not involved in abusive behaviour. We can therefore assume that the perpetrator, socially integrated, feels themselves to be a favourable position to commit repeated offences without risk of exclusion, by maintaining a leader status within a peer group.

The cyberharasser tends to be characterised as lacking courage due to the ability to hide behind the anonymity of the internet and the lack of risk inculcated in direct confrontation with their victims.

5 Consequences

When we think about the consequences of cyberharassment, we tend to think about the impacts this behaviour has on its victims. Cyberharassment involves a number of actors, each of which are going to

be impacted in some way by the dynamic, primarily the victim, but also the harasser as well as the witnesses both passive and active.

For the victim

For the victim, cyberharrassment can rapidly lead to feelings of distress, isolation, shame and fear, which can get worse as the phenomenon persists.

Victims can be pushed to introversion, to a loss of confidence in themselves and in others, and to experience depression. In the case of identity theft, we must also consider reputational consequences, financially and professional, which may follow the victim for years.

The intensity of this psychological suffering, being often invisible and silence, can be difficult to understand. We know however that it can lead to dire consequences, including suicide.

When considering cyberharassment, we tend to focus on the experience of the victim. This is because, as targets, they tend to engender the phenomenon more that the perpetrators.

For the online abuser

In the case of the young cyberharasser, levelling abuse at others from the vantage point of online anonymity can lead to more serious behavioural issues later in life. As online abuse is a kind of depersonalised violence (the cyberharasser does not usually confront their victim directly, nor the consequences of their violence), the perpetrator will begin to reject responsibility and normalise abusive behaviour in digital spaces and possibly also in real life.

For witnesses (active and passive)

Cyberharassment affects us whether we are directly involved or not.

For passive witnesses, seeing an instance of online abuse and doing nothing only serves to normalise behaviour that should instead concern us all.

For active witnesses who support the victim, there is a risk of becoming directly involved, but also a positive outcome. We will learn how to support victims in the next chapter!

Cyberharassment has therefore serious consequences on victims' well-being and mental health. It is often invisible but here are some revealing signs:

- Anxiety, fear
- Lack of self-confidence, pessimistic disposition
- Repeated complaints

- Trouble sleeping
- Absenteeism
- Threats (to harm themselves or others)
- Isolation

6 Impact of cyberharassment on the victim's online reputation

When someone posts something online, it is certainly possible to remove it (by contacting the concerned platform for example) but this can be a complicated process. There are large amounts of data concerning us stored with or without our consent on search engines or on social media. We are here talking about internet memory.

Online information can also be endlessly duplicated by other platforms and be accessed by millions of people.

Take the example of a photo of you that was on your phone that was stolen that was then posted on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and in WhatsApp groups. In this case, it would be hard to take back control. In this example, cyberharassment can affect something that is particularly important in our digital circles: online reputation.

Here is a video that explains online reputation.

7 How to act as a young witness

In the case of passive witnesses, seeing an instance of online abuse and doing nothing only serves to normalise behaviour that should instead concern us all.

For active witnesses who support the victim, there is a risk of becoming directly involved, but there can also be a positive outcome.

Denouncing this online harassment calls for courage and empathy for someone who is suffering behind

their screen. But it also requires practical knowledge. If someone is underage and a victim of cyberharassment, it is never a good idea to try to solve the problem themselves or to try to redirect the abuse back towards the harasser!

A young witness should ask someone for help and answers:

- To a trusted adult (parents, teachers, etc.) Speaking about harassment is not 'being a snitch'. It means helping a victim who is suffering so that the situation does not get any worse. Adults are there to listen, to help the victim and bring solutions.
- To a school friend or class delegate who will then speak to an adult in a place of authority
- If a witness is afraid, they should be aware that adults in positions of authority – particularly in an educational setting – are obligated to help and protect them.

Speaking about harassment is to act so that the same situation does not happen to others.

A witness should be as precise as possible by describing the facts that they have noticed, the date and time on which they took place, and the people involved. If a witness sees hurtful messages directed to someone, they shouldn't delete them, but screenshot them, flag them, and show them to an adult.

8 Complaints and fines

If you are a witness to or a victim of cyberharassment and you live the European Union, you can see this page to see which reporting website you should refer to.

However, without waiting for an official investigation to begin, the victim can begin to collect proof of harassment, for example by screenshotting every instance where it takes place.

Generally, but depending on which country you live in, you can report cybercrime at your local police station. Typically, a minor can go alone, but for an official complaint to be registered, it must be done by by their parents or guardians. Prosecuted cyberharassers can face large fines and prison sentences depending on the severity of their crimes.

9 Going further

There are many online resources on this subject. The following contains information, videos and further links:

- Internet safety for kids – Cyberbullying and cyberharassment

The next link is a site meant for young people, offering professional counselling, information and referrals and volunteer-led, text-based support:

- Kids Help Phone

The following is a constantly updated list of contact information for many different social media platforms and apps for reporting instances of cyberharassment:

- cyberbullying.org

Finally, Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy has a section dedicated to cyberharassment which compiles large amounts of resources for teachers, facilitators and parents for broaching the subject.

- Media Smarts: Cyberbullying

There are also a number of great books for kids and adolescents on the subject of bullying:

- *Matilda*, Roald Dahl
- *Blubber,* Judy Blume
- *Freak the Mighty*, Judy Blume
- *The Name Jar,* Yangsook Choi
- and many more