



Hidden Behind the Screen

A comprehensive guide to cyberbullying
for schools and kura

Part Three

The Causes and Antecedents of Cyberbullying

Greater Christchurch Schools' Network

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GREATER CHRISTCHURCH
SCHOOLS' NETWORK

The Causes and Antecedents of Cyberbullying

Take Home Messages

- There are many contributing factors to why ākongā perpetrate cyberbullying and why they target individuals
- Understanding these causal factors and antecedents provides the necessary context for schools and kura to understand the complex nature of cyberbullying
- Many antecedents can be sorted into the categories of individual factors, social factors, family/whānau/home factors, and environmental factors
- These antecedents interplay to contribute to the perpetration of cyberbullying, and not a single antecedent can be solely responsible for cyberbullying behaviour
- Cyberbullying needs to be approached with compassion for some of the unique circumstances that contribute to inappropriate behaviour online
- Individual factors describe how things such as empathy, self-esteem, ego protection, impulsivity, aggressiveness, and behavioural disorders contribute to cyberbullying perpetration
- Social factors include peer influence, social rejection, peer pressure, and lack of social skills
- Family/whānau/home factors include parental involvement/supervision, and behaviour modelling (social learning)
- Environmental factors are more specific to the nature of technologies, such as online anonymity, access to technology, cyberbullying norms, and school policies/procedures

Understanding cyberbullying requires an understanding of the why.

Why do people cyberbully?

Why are people targeted?

Understanding the context of cyberbullying can help schools and kura, staff, and caregivers to understand how and why it starts and how, and where to target support to safeguard ākongā online. There is an element of uncertainty, cyberbullying may occur to anyone for a variety of unknown reasons, however, understanding individual, social, family, environmental, and psychological factors can help schools and kura grapple with cyberbullying behaviours.

It is important to note that the causes and antecedents of cyberbullying interact in complex ways, each influencing the likelihood of cyberbullying incidents, however, no single factor can be attributed to the cause of cyberbullying.¹

Individual Factors

Individual factors are specific to the individuals who perpetrate cyberbullying.

➤ Low empathy

A commonly referenced individual factor in research on cyberbullying is **low empathy**. A lack of empathy is often found in those who perpetrate cyberbullying as they display disregard for those they victimise.²

Someone with low empathy may struggle to understand or relate to the feelings of others. They may show a lack of concern for the impact of their actions on others. Having low empathy may contribute to:

- A lack of understanding of the consequences of their actions
- Having a reduced emotional connection with others
- Being unable to recognise emotional distress in others
- A deficiency in perspective-taking
- Desensitisation to the pain of others
- Seeking personal gratification at the expense of others
- Detaching themselves from personal interactions
- Being influenced by social norms and peers, even when they are morally wrong

¹ Zych, I., Baldry, A. C., Farrington, D. P., & Llorent, V. J. (2019). Are children involved in cyberbullying low on empathy? A systematic review and meta-analysis of research on empathy versus different cyberbullying roles. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 45, 83-97.

² *ibid*

Empathy is unique to individuals and develops throughout childhood, adolescence, and even into adulthood. Largely, empathy is affected by our experiences of the world and those around us. Empathy is a large component of child development and neuropsychology and is an important thing to foster through digital citizenship (in the next section of this guide).

Underdeveloped empathy, or a lack of empathy, manifests as ākongā who are unable to take the perspectives of others, struggle to make emotional connections, and lack consideration of how their actions affect other people. In the case of cyberbullying, a lack of empathy contributes to ākongā who see little fault in their cyberbullying behaviour, or who cannot understand the long-term negative effects their cyberbullying has on their victims. Low cognitive empathy may mean that some ākongā are able to understand the emotions of their victims but do not share those emotions.³

Empathy is also an important consideration for bystanders and witnesses. That is the people who observe cyberbullying but who are not direct victims of it. Higher empathy is associated with helping behaviour in cyberbullying events. Conversely, those with lower empathy are more likely to join in the cyberbullying behaviour and exacerbate the damage.⁴

Another important consideration for the development of empathy is differences in brain structure and development. For example, those who are neurodiverse, exhibit global developmental delay, or have intellectual disabilities. For some, the development of empathy may be different to their peers. This is not to say that students with conditions that affect the development of empathy will engage in cyberbullying due to their condition, as all factors need to be considered. Research has, however, established links between cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation in those with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (ASD).⁵

➤ Low self-esteem

Not only can cyberbullying result in victims having low self-esteem, but those with low self-esteem may be more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying. One reason for this is the feeling of inadequacy and needing to cyberbully others to “bring them down to the same level” or inflict harm with the hope of raising one’s own self-esteem.

Another reason why people with low self-esteem engage in cyberbullying is social bonding. Low self-esteem weakens social bonding, and as such people with low self-esteem are less likely to comply with social rules and engage in cyberbullying knowing it is wrong.⁶

³ Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., & Perren, S. (2013). Longitudinal risk factors for cyberbullying in adolescence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), 52-67.

⁴ Van Cleemput, K., Vandebosch, H., & Pabian, S. (2014). Personal characteristics and contextual factors that determine “helping”, “joining in”, and “doing nothing” when witnessing cyberbullying. *Aggressive behavior*, 40(5), 383-396.

⁵ Hu, H. F., Liu, T. L., Hsiao, R. C., Ni, H. C., Liang, S. H. Y., Lin, C. F., ... & Yen, C. F. (2019). Cyberbullying victimization and perpetration in adolescents with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder: Correlations with depression, anxiety, and suicidality. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49, 4170-4180.

⁶ Lei, H., Mao, W., Cheong, C. M., Wen, Y., Cui, Y., & Cai, Z. (2020). The relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying: A meta-analysis of children and youth students. *Current Psychology*, 39, 830-842.

➤ Ego protection

Conversely, research has also found in some cases that higher self-esteem is an antecedent of cyberbullying. In these cases, the cyberbully exhibits high levels of self-esteem, yet still engages in cyberbullying activities that harm and degrade those they perceive as being 'below' them. This may be due to egotism, whereby those who evaluate themselves highly have an inflated, unrealistic ego, and having a vulnerable self-esteem like this makes them have a strong ego defence. This encourages them to engage in cyberbullying as it reaffirms their self-esteem and their social position compared to their victim.⁷

For example, consider a cyberbully who is considered the leader of their peer group. They already have high social standing among their peers, and they do not necessarily need to bring others down to have a higher opinion of themselves. However, their inflated ego may be fragile and while they have high social standing, their self-evaluation may be exaggerated and vulnerable to small faults. As a result, they engage in cyberbullying behaviours to reaffirm to themselves that they are, in fact, the leader and justified in their positive self-evaluations.

➤ Impulsivity

Impulsive individuals are more likely to engage in cyberbullying as they are less likely to consider the consequences of actions or long-term effects. Impulsivity is often associated with cyberbullying behaviours, and this is largely because of how the Internet enables simple victimisation.⁸ Bullying online allows for anonymity, and this anonymity may lower inhibitions to act uncivilly. A lack of accountability and consequence allows impulsive individuals to act on cyberbullying impulses without duly considering its effects.

Impulsive individuals also tend to make rapid decisions without proper evaluation. Impulsivity may lead to hasty actions online without first considering what the behaviour will do to others, or even themselves if caught. Impulsive individuals will also act on impulses without forethought, and those impulses may be dangerous or harmful to others. The impulse may offer immediate emotional gratification such as fun or satisfaction from the actions.

Impulsiveness also plays a role in bystanders and witnesses. This is because the inhibitory effects of impulsiveness may inhibit witnesses from acting when they see cyberbullying, and they may act on their impulses to help the victim.⁹ While impulsivity may be considered a risk factor for engaging in cyberbullying behaviours or supporting perpetrators, it may also have a protective effect in that people may act on impulses to shut down cyberbullies or protect victims.

⁷ Lei, H., Mao, W., Cheong, C. M., Wen, Y., Cui, Y., & Cai, Z. (2020). The relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying: A meta-analysis of children and youth students. *Current Psychology*, 39, 830-842.

⁸ López-Larrañaga, M., & Orue, I. (2019). Interaction of psychopathic traits in the prediction of cyberbullying behavior. *Revista de Psicopatología y Psicología Clínica*, 24(1), 7-21.

⁹ Erreygers, S., Pabian, S., Vandebosch, H., & Baillien, E. (2016). Helping behavior among adolescent bystanders of cyberbullying: The role of impulsivity. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 48, 61-67.

➤ Aggression

Aggression is another common factor associated with cyberbullying behaviours and is often considered a precursor to cyberbullying behaviours. This relates to the criteria of power imbalance discussed in the previous section of this guide. The relationship between general aggression and cyberbullying is murky as cyberbullying is often considered a form of aggression in the research.

Research has found that aggressive behaviour at school has a strong relationship with perpetrating cyberbullying, and those who cyberbully are also those with a tendency to be more aggressive in general at school.¹⁰ Understanding aggression may help determine why some ākongā engage in cyberbullying as an extension of the behaviour they show at school or in other contexts.

Often, victims indicate that the person cyberbullying them does not bully them in person (i.e. on school grounds), however, cyberbullies are often known to the victim and in many cases, the aggressive behaviour shown in person then extends into online environments.¹¹ Similarly, those who are traditional bullies (bullying in person) are more likely to be cyberbullies.¹² Schools and kura may make headway in addressing bullying behaviour that is directly observable or out in the open, but then be unable to notice or combat the cyberbullying done outside of the physical boundaries of the school.

Aggression is also related to impulsivity, as those with impulsive tendencies may act on aggressive impulses without adequate forethought of the consequences of their behaviours. The immediacy and anonymity afforded by the Internet and social media allow for cyberbullies to quickly act with little immediate consequence, if any. This may also fuel instant gratification as cyberbullies can quickly satisfy aggressive needs upon acting on their impulsivity.

Aggression is also a modelled/observed behaviour, putting young people at a particularly high risk. This is discussed further in the social and family factors of cyberbullying. Where aggressive behaviour is normalised by others, ākongā may replicate this behaviour online.

¹⁰ Fletcher, A., Fitzgerald-Yau, N., Jones, R., Allen, E., Viner, R. M., & Bonell, C. (2014). Brief report: Cyberbullying perpetration and its associations with socio-demographics, aggressive behaviour at school, and mental health outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(8), 1393-1398.

¹¹ Waasdorp, T. E., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2015). The overlap between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(5), 483-488.

¹² Smith, P. K., Mahdavi, J., Carvalho, M., Fisher, S., Russell, S., & Tippett, N. (2008). Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49, 376-385.

➤ Oppositional defiance and misconduct

Those with experience managing difficult behaviours and ākongā with high behavioural needs will be familiar with the struggles associated with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD). Both are conditions of child behaviour diagnosed by practitioners (though signs and symptoms may be seen by caregivers and teachers).

ODD involves the persistent defiance and disobedience toward authority figures, and ākongā with ODD are less responsive to instruction and disciplinary action. CD is manifested more in overtly aggressive and violent behaviour intended to cause harm to others. ODD may precede the development of CD, as CD is considered more severe in terms of the behavioural norms and rights of others that are violated.

While commonly attributed to misbehaviour and children being ‘naughty’, it is extremely important to note the neurological differences in ākongā with ODD and CD to understand that such behaviours are a direct result of how their brains are wired. For example, brain scans have found with young people with ODD and CD have abnormalities in the limbic system of the brain, areas associated with threat detection, behavioural reinforcement, inhibitory control, and emotional processing.¹³ As such, ākongā with ODD and/or CD have impairments in how they regulate and control their emotions, attribute emotions to others, and inhibit their impulses. Impairments to reinforcement make it more difficult for teachers and caregivers to administer rewards and punishments as they will not have the desired effect.

This area is not widely studied, and research into cyberbullying is still emerging. There have, however, been studies to show that CD is associated with significantly higher rates of cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration.¹⁴ This aligns with traditional bullying being perpetrated in online environments as those with behavioural issues extend their poor behaviour to online environments. Those with rule-breaking tendencies in general have also been found to be at higher risk for engaging in cyberbullying.¹⁵

¹³ Noordermeer, S. D., Luman, M., & Oosterlaan, J. (2016). A systematic review and meta-analysis of neuroimaging in oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD) taking attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) into account. *Neuropsychology Review*, 26, 44-72.

¹⁴ Baumann, S., Bernhard, A., Martinelli, A., Ackermann, K., Herpertz-Dahlmann, B., Freitag, C., ... & Kohls, G. (2023). Perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying among youth with conduct disorder. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(9), 1643-1653.

¹⁵ Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., & Perren, S. (2013). Longitudinal risk factors for cyberbullying in adolescence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), 52-67.

Social Factors

Another important consideration is how ākongas act in social settings and how human behaviour is largely attributed to social interactions and the people around us. Note that intervention in this space requires looking into the group dynamics of ākongas and targeting behavioural norms. This is the focus of the next section of the guide on digital citizenship and changing the norms around cyberbullying.

➤ Peer influence

The relative influence of peers and social groups in influencing cyberbullying is well-established. For example, those who perceive their friends and peers to engage in cyberbullying are more likely to engage in such behaviours themselves, conforming to a social norm of cyberbullying.¹⁶ Similarly, a higher adherence to social norms of cyberbullying results in a higher likelihood of cyberbullying.¹⁷ Cyberbullying is social in nature, and cyberbullying acts as a means to relate to our own or harm others.

How people relate to one another, in particular, their peer groups, can be explained by in-group out-group theory. In simple terms, those people that ākongas closely associate with (friends) are considered their in-group, and people outside of that are considered the out-group. Behaviour is highly influenced by ākongas making attempts to relate to their in-group, raise their status within the in-group, or raise the status of the in-group compared to out-groups. Ākongas may also engage in behaviours that harm or lower the status of the out-group, such as bullying and harassment. In-groups establish norms of behaving, and belonging to an in-group requires ākongas to conform to these group norms and act accordingly.

To understand the influence this can have on behaviour, consider your experiences:

- When have ākongas done something just because their friends were doing it?
- When have ākongas been bullied or victimised for simply being different?
- When have groups of ākongas all started engaging in the same behaviours or trends at the same time?
- When have entire groups of ākongas clashed?
- When have ākongas been rejected by their peers for not engaging in the same behaviours?

¹⁶ Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2013). Social influences on cyberbullying behaviors among middle and high school students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 711-722.

¹⁷ Piccoli, V., Carnaghi, A., Grassi, M., Stragà, M., & Bianchi, M. (2020). Cyberbullying through the lens of social influence: Predicting cyberbullying perpetration from perceived peer-norm, cyberspace regulations and ingroup processes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 102, 260-273.

Many dangerous or harmful behaviours can be attributed to peer influence. For example, engaging in smoking or vaping, sexual conduct, viral Internet trends, fighting etc. In terms of cyberbullying, conforming with an in-group may require ākongā to engage in cyberbullying, or double-down on the cyberbullying being conducted by someone else. This is separate from peer pressure outlined below.

Peer influence is extremely important to consider in terms of bystanders and witnesses to cyberbullying. Conforming with social norms and in-group behaviours plays a large role in bystanders contributing to cyberbullying.¹⁸ Because of this, it is essential that schools and kura understand peer influence and can target cyberbullying from a social perspective.

➤ Peer pressure

Peer pressure is a primary reason that adolescents participate in risky behaviours, however, peer pressure can affect younger ākongā too as they start to develop their identity socially and establish social hierarchies. It is a specific form of peer influence, encouraging peers to engage in (often negative) behaviours to maintain or raise their social status with their peers. Peer pressure also plays a considerable role in the perpetration of cyberbullying.¹⁹

Being peer pressured into the behaviour by others is associated with becoming a perpetrator of cyberbullying. This relationship may go both ways, in that those who cyberbully are also more likely to apply peer pressure to others.

As discussed earlier with peer influence, peer pressure also plays an important role in whether bystanders start to engage in cyberbullying behaviour.²⁰ Those who apply pressure may encourage others around them to join in on the cyberbullying and apply additional harm to the victim.

Research has also suggested that peer pressure plays a particularly important role in encouraging those to cyberbully who would otherwise not due to their attitudes toward cyberbullying. While those who have particularly negative attitudes toward cyberbullying tend not to engage in behaviour, regardless of peers, those with neutral attitudes are swayed into the behaviour by peer pressure.²¹

Peer pressure is an important area of intervention for handling cyberbullying behaviours.

¹⁸ Bastiaensens, S., Pabian, S., Vandebosch, H., Poels, K., Van Cleemput, K., DeSmet, A., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2016). From normative influence to social pressure: How relevant others affect whether bystanders join in cyberbullying. *Social Development*, 25(1), 193-211.

¹⁹ Yang, J., Li, S., Gao, L., & Wang, X. (2022). Longitudinal associations among peer pressure, moral disengagement and cyberbullying perpetration in adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 137, 107420.

²⁰ Bastiaensens, S., Pabian, S., Vandebosch, H., Poels, K., Van Cleemput, K., DeSmet, A., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2016). From normative influence to social pressure: How relevant others affect whether bystanders join in cyberbullying. *Social Development*, 25(1), 193-211.

²¹ Shim, H., & Shin, E. (2016). Peer-group pressure as a moderator of the relationship between attitude toward cyberbullying and cyberbullying behaviors on mobile instant messengers. *Telematics and Informatics*, 33(1), 17-24.

➤ Social rejection

Experiencing social rejection or feelings of alienation may result in cyberbullying as a means of coping with one's insecurities. The social strain experienced from being rejected by peers is associated with cyberbullying behaviours.²² Ākonga are rejected by peers for a number of reasons, such as being perceived as immature, awkward, social unskilled, timid, or weird by others. The build-up of rejection often results in aggression, and this can then occur in online environments in the form of cyberbullying. This behaviour could also be viewed as “getting back” at the peer(s) who rejected or alienated them.

Those who have low social status are also more likely to be victimised in bullying incidents. This ongoing experience of cyberbullying further alienates them, making them feel rejected, and they may be more likely to engage in cyberbullying themselves later.²³

Social rejection may also be a tool cyberbullies use to exclude others who do not belong to their in-group. In this way, cyberbullies use social rejection to bully others and make them feel excluded from online groups and communities.

➤ Lack of social skills

Ākonga with a lack of social skills may struggle to navigate online interactions and communications effectively and may not understand the inappropriateness of their online behaviours. Research has shown that ākonga with low social skills may be more likely to engage in bullying and cyberbullying behaviours, and conversely, high social skills is a protective factor.²⁴

Social skills include social/conversational competencies, conflict resolution skills, and assertiveness. Social skills are important for empathy, taking perspective, resolving issues, building relationships, understanding (and complying with) social etiquette, and acting in prosocial ways. Deficits in these areas can make it more difficult for ākonga to navigate online interactions and de-escalate issues before they get out of control.

It is important to note that social skills are influenced by a number of individual, social, and environmental factors. Social skills can be taught, but this is not necessarily easy. Young people learn from parents/caregivers, teachers, other adults, peers and friends, and assisting in the deliberate learning of social skills can help mitigate the risk of harmful online behaviours such as cyberbullying.

²² Wright, M. F., & Li, Y. (2013). The association between cyber victimization and subsequent cyber aggression: The moderating effect of peer rejection. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 662-674.

²³ idem

²⁴ Martínez, J., Rodríguez-Hidalgo, A. J., & Zych, I. (2020). Bullying and cyberbullying in adolescents from disadvantaged areas: Validation of questionnaires; prevalence rates; and relationship to self-esteem, empathy and social skills. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17), 6199.

Family/Whānau/Home Factors

The family, whānau, and home environment play a large role in the behaviours of ākonga. It is important to note that these are interconnected, and the experience of the home environment can be affected by individual circumstances.

➤ Parental involvement and supervision

Parental involvement is a significant influencer of behaviour, particularly as we consider the busy life of adults in the 21st century. As ākonga are increasingly reliant on digital technologies to learn, connect with others, and be entertained, they are also increasingly exposed to potential harm online and complex interactions with others. All in all, the research suggests that it is essential for parents to be actively involved in their children's digital lives.

Namely, parental warmth and parental monitoring are important for reducing the perpetration of cyberbullying.²⁵ Parents play important roles in access to digital technologies, including devices for learning purposes, communication purposes, and entertainment/babysitting purposes. This is a particular concern with the 'iPad' generation of children, where behavioural outcomes are increasingly linked to time spent isolated on devices. The importance of parental time and warmth are becoming increasingly pertinent in behaviour management.

Parents, however, must grapple with the fact that much of what ākonga do online will be beyond their knowledge and monitoring. This, coupled with the fact that parents often lack sufficient knowledge about rapidly changing technologies and communication channels, particularly social media and gaming platforms, can make it difficult to monitor and understand. For example, in 2020 Netsafe found that 19% of parents were aware their child had been bothered or upset by something online in the last 12 months, compared with 25% of children between 9 and 17 years saying that this was something they experienced.²⁶ Through fostering a warm, communicative relationship, ākonga will be more likely to speak up about what they are doing and witnessing online.

Similarly with parental involvement, parents and families/whānau play pivotal roles in managing behaviour, both in-person and in online environments. This comes in the form of reinforcing behaviour and administering fair discipline. Fair discipline is an important caveat, as authoritarian parenting is a risk factor for cyberbullying perpetration.²⁷ This is largely because an authoritative parenting style reinforces that exerting power and control is how you influence others, and ākonga then use this behaviour in online environments away from their parents' awareness.

²⁵ Elsaesser, C., Russell, B., Ohannessian, C. M., & Patton, D. (2017). Parenting in a digital age: A review of parents' role in preventing adolescent cyberbullying. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 35, 62-72.

²⁶ Pacheco, E., & Melhuish, N. (2020). *Parental awareness of children's experiences of online risks and harm*. Retrieved from <https://netsafe.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Factsheet-Parental-awareness-of-childrens-experiences-of-online-risks-and-harm.pdf>

²⁷ Young, K., & Govender, C. (2018). A comparison of gender, age, grade, and experiences of authoritarian parenting amongst traditional and cyberbullying perpetrators. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(Supplement 1), s1-s11.

Strict parenting, punitive behaviour management (resorting to punishments), and the use of physical force are also associated with greater cyberbullying behaviour.²⁸ These parenting styles are characterised by:

- Bad humour regarding bullying
- Punitive methods of behaviour control (punishment rather than restoration)
- Psychological control
- Cold temperament
- Being overly demanding of children
- Coercive behaviour
- Physical discipline and violence
- Poor communication
- Removal of autonomy

As such, a democratic parenting style is beneficial for reducing cyberbullying perpetration.²⁹ Democratic parents engage in greater communication, building trusting relationships and providing guidance and discipline in a caring, warm, fair way. Ākongā will be more likely to communicate openly with their parents about behaviour and cyberbullying and have empathy and warmth modelled to them.

➤ Behaviour modelling and social learning

Social learning is one of the most important considerations for child behavioural development. Throughout childhood, child brains act like sponges observing the behaviour of those around them, particularly their parents and family units, and use them as role models of behaviour. Children then copy behaviours and assess the outcomes.

In this way, aggressive, antisocial, and risky behaviours in children are often learned, particularly at a younger age.³⁰ This includes the ways that parents interact with one another, how they express frustration or anger, how they communicate their feelings (or do not express emotions), and how they use digital technologies. Witnessing violence at home, for example, can normalise violent behaviour. This includes the learning of prosocial and altruistic ways of communicating.³¹

Interestingly, there may be differences in gender with regards to parenting reinforcement. Research has suggested that girls are more discouraged from physical, outward forms of aggression, and as a result, can be more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviours as a more hidden, subtle form of aggression.³²

²⁸ Gómez-Ortiz, O., Romera, E. M., Ortega-Ruiz, R., & Del Rey, R. (2018). Parenting practices as risk or preventive factors for adolescent involvement in cyberbullying: Contribution of children and parent gender. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(12), 2664.

²⁹ Gómez-Ortiz et al. (2018), as above.

³⁰ Ovejero, A., Yubero, S., Larrañaga, E., & de la V. Moral, M. (2016). Cyberbullying: Definitions and facts from a psychosocial perspective. *Cyberbullying across the globe: Gender, family, and mental health*, 1-31.

³¹ Ibid

³² Navarro, R. (2016). Gender issues and cyberbullying in children and adolescents: From gender differences to gender identity measures. *Cyberbullying across the globe: Gender, family, and mental health*, 35-61.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors encompass elements of the digital landscape and socio-cultural context that influence the perpetration of cyberbullying.

➤ Online anonymity

As discussed earlier in the description of cyberbullying, the Internet can provide anonymity to cyberbullies to perpetrate aggressive behaviours seemingly undetected and without consequence. This can embolden individuals to engage in cyberbullying and there may be reduced perceived accountability.

Perceived anonymity online influences ākongā positive attitudes toward cyberbullying, thus increasing the likelihood that they participate in cyberbullying behaviours and the frequency of these behaviours.³³ Anonymity often leads to cyberbullying incidents being viewed as worse compared to traditional bullying.³⁴

Anonymity can also affect bystanders and witnesses to cyberbullying, as their anonymity means that their action will be less likely to personally affect them or backfire, but it also means they feel they won't be judged morally by the victim for not acting.³⁵ Whether anonymity helps or hinders bystander action will be determined by the individual.

Exposing anonymity and showing ākongā that their actions can be traced is important for reducing the frequency and severity of cyberbullying. Digital footprints and the concept of perceived anonymity should be included in digital citizenship education to ensure ākongā understand the permanence of their actions.

➤ Access to technology

As digital technologies play a larger role in our everyday lives, they are becoming increasingly present and easy to access. BYOD (bring your own device) and other school policies, and the availability of learning devices such as Chromebooks etc. mean that ākongā are increasingly able to access the Internet. Smartphones are now also commonly owned by children, and even young children now often carry smartphones that allow them to access the Internet.

³³ Barlett, C. P., Gentile, D. A., & Chew, C. (2016). Predicting cyberbullying from anonymity. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 5(2), 171-180.

³⁴ Sticca, F., & Perren, S. (2013). Is cyberbullying worse than traditional bullying? Examining the differential roles of medium, publicity, and anonymity for the perceived severity of bullying. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 739-750.

³⁵ You, L., & Lee, Y. H. (2019). The bystander effect in cyberbullying on social network sites: Anonymity, group size, and intervention intentions. *Telematics and Informatics*, 45, 101284.

Smartphone ownership increases the prevalence of cyberbullying, and access to technology is a known risk factor of cyberbullying.³⁶ Technology ownership is considered a given, thus needs to be accompanied with targeted education on appropriate use and effective channels of communication between ākongā and adults.

Links have also been found between the frequency of online communications and the perpetration of cyberbullying. Those who use digital technologies to communicate frequently may be at a higher risk of using them for aggressive purposes.³⁷

➤ Cyberbullying norms

In some cases, cyberbullying may be a normalised behaviour. This could be within a peer group or across an entire school or larger community. Exposure to cyberbullying on social media sites and forums etc. may also make the behaviour seem normalised. Where cyberbullying has become normal or goes on unaddressed, ākongā may feel emboldened to perpetrate cyberbullying themselves. Peer groups with a norm of cyberbullying have increased instances of cyberbullying, particularly when group members lack knowledge about appropriate online behaviour.³⁸ Also, the strength of peer group relationships can make ākongā more likely to engage in the norm of cyberbullying as a means to fit in with a group.³⁹

This signals the importance of stopping cyberbullying quickly and early. Ongoing instances of cyberbullying may normalise behaviour within and across groups of ākongā, signalling to them that aggression online is expected and normal.

➤ School rules and policies

Ākongā may be influenced by the policies, rules, and values of the school/kura, provided these are clear. Schools should take a zero-tolerance approach to cyberbullying, in line with their values surrounding respect, kindness, and community etc., and communicate these to ākongā and the wider school/kura community.

How schools approach cyberbullying will depend on policies, resources, staff, and other variables. The consequences of cyberbullying may discourage ākongā from perpetuating cyberbullying.

This guide will also discuss digital citizenship and the importance of building a school/kura-wide culture that denounces all forms of bullying, holding ākongā accountable and helping them hold one another to account.

³⁶ Englander, E. (2019). Childhood access to technology and cyberbullying. *Journal of Paediatrics and Paediatric Medicine*, 3(2), 1-4.

³⁷ Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., & Perren, S. (2013). Longitudinal risk factors for cyberbullying in adolescence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), 52-67.

³⁸ Piccoli, V., Carnaghi, A., Grassi, M., Stragà, M., & Bianchi, M. (2020). Cyberbullying through the lens of social influence: Predicting cyberbullying perpetration from perceived peer-norm, cyberspace regulations and ingroup processes. *Computers in human behavior*, 102, 260-273.

³⁹ Idem.

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