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# DIGITAL DRAMA

CREATING AWARENESS  
AGAINST **CYBERBULLYING**

Chief Minister's  
Round Table Of  
Young Territorians



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2014 MEMBER

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# Delete Digital Drama: Creating awareness against Cyberbullying

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## ABSTRACT

Bullying has existed in our society since the beginning of time. Starting from a competitive social hierarchy, bullying has always been an important issue. Bullying through technological means, which is also known as cyberbullying, has increased the issue of bullying and made it become harder to define and control. A comprehensive analysis on many different case studies, surveys, news articles and law cases has been conducted to create a better understanding on the issue of cyberbullying, as well as finding the most appropriate preventive measures to be undertaken. The aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding on the situation, its social implications, and recommended preventive steps to stop cyberbullying.

## INTRODUCTION

Every day, students learn valuable lessons in class as well as through daily interactions with their peers. Although education is, undoubtedly, beneficial to all young Territorians, there are some experiences, such as bullying, that might have a negative impact on them throughout their lives.

To bully others is part of the nature of many young people in channelling their frustrations (Cross 2009). In the past, these actions could be better controlled because they were limited to face-to-face interactions. However, in recent years, the development of communication technology has made it more dangerous and harder to contain. Mobile phones, social media sites, and other forms of technology have allowed bullying to expand into the cyberspace. This new form of abuse is known as cyberbullying.

This research paper underlines the key findings of a research project that focuses on several young people living in the Northern Territory (NT), with an age range of 14 to 25, who had either experienced cyberbullying themselves or are aware of some cases. This study aims to explore the nature of cyberbullying, its relationship with traditional schoolyard bullying, its impacts and the effectiveness of the already implemented coping strategies used by young people.

## THE ISSUE OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying has become an infamous phenomenon amongst young people, impacting their wellbeing, education, friendship and family relationships (Patchin and Hinduja 2006). It is a form of bullying in which 'the bully' uses electronic means, such as the internet or a mobile phone, to aggressively and intentionally harm someone.

Just like the traditional form of bullying, cyberbullying normally involves repeated behaviour and a power imbalance between the bully and victim. It is not only limited to spread hurtful messages through email or text message, but also includes threats, social exclusion tactics, or even spreading rumours such as circulating offensive images of the victim. As the addiction to communication technology grows among young people, the number of potential victims of cyberbullying also increases to a more serious level.

There has not been comprehensive research on this form of bullying in the NT, although, based on various research papers on cases of bullying among young Australians, around 9% to 49% of bullying cases are conducted online using wide variance of mediums including text messages, emails and social networking sites (Juvonen and Gross 2008). Even though the number of cyberbullying cases is not as high as traditional bullying, the vast advancement of communication technology in recent years suggests a high potential for this form of bullying to increase in the future.

Like 'traditional' bullying, the most common age for cyberbullying to occur appears to be in the transition ages from primary to secondary school. Cyberbullying is also common in the later years of high school (Cross 2009). While many surveys suggest that young males tend to be the primary actors and victims of 'traditional' bullying behaviour, there seems to be

some contradiction where cyberbullying is concerned (Olweus 1993). Recent research has shown that cyberbullying appears to follow a gender pattern opposite to what occurring offline. That is, girls tend to report slightly higher involvement than boys in this form of bullying, both as bullies and victims (Cross 2009).

One of the main attractions of cyberbullying, compared to traditional bullying, is that the virtual environment in which bullying can occur allows bullies to feel less accountable for their actions (Keith and Martin 2005). There are mixed opinions in regard to the significance of cyberbullying issues. Some studies have suggested that the intensity of cyberbullying and traditional bullying are comparable, while others propose the impacts of cyberbullying can be more severe (Smith et al. 2008). Data available from Kids Helpline Australia suggests that young people impacted by cyberbullying may be more likely to experience suicidal thoughts as a reaction to cyberbullying, in comparison to those experiencing traditional bullying.

One area of importance that has gained much attention in research papers and articles, particularly overseas, are the strategies used to overcome cyberbullying. One of the main findings that keeps appearing in the literature is that young people are rarely proactive in informing adults about being cyberbullied. One study conducted in the United States found as many as 90% of victims claimed to have not told an adult, as result of fears of humiliation, embarrassment, and not being believed, or maybe simply concerned that they would be questioned, judged, or being restricted to access technology devices (Juvonen and Gross 2008).

A clear benefit of the online environment is that it provides potential cyberbullying victims with range of coping tools that are not available offline. For instance, the victims can attempt to avoid receiving messages from suspected bullies by blocking their screen names from their computer or simply change their profile picture (Juvonen and Gross 2008). However, the effectiveness of these strategies and its alternatives are still unknown.

## **CREATING AWARENESS**

Community members such as educators, law enforcement officers, and community leaders can help prevent cyberbullying and promote safe and responsible Internet use throughout

their communities. Several community engagement activities may be conducted to raise awareness on the issue. Activities that were run this year as part of this community-based project are good examples of cyberbullying prevention activities. The activities present special programs on the local community radio about cyberbullying, creating a full video documentary to tell stories of young Territorians who had experienced cyberbullying, creating a survey which received 69 responses, as well as conducting seminars and public lecture on the issue. These activities have been designed to improve awareness in the community on cyberbullying and its negative impacts, as well as preventive actions that everyone in the community can understand and help raise awareness on cyberbullying and take preventive action against this ever-growing problem. The activities undertaken for this project are explained below.

## Radio

Radio Campaigns are an efficient tool to influence the public opinion. This is because radio reaches a wider audience than any other medium, and is accessible to people who are otherwise isolated by geography. Community radio stations can play a significant role in increasing participation, idea sharing and diversifying knowledge on cyberbullying.

In collaboration with the NT Multicultural Broadcasting Council and Darwin Xstream Radio (91.5FM), it is possible to work closely with experts and young people around the Territory to discuss the complexity of cyberbullying along with possible solutions in a live talk show. The radio program for this Round Table project was broadcasted on Tuesday night, 19 August 2014, featuring guest speakers from the NT Open Education Centre (NTOEC), and the law faculty of the Charles Darwin University (CDU).

The show ran for the whole hour, discussing possible laws and solutions that can be applied by the government and community leaders in addressing cyberbullying cases. The discussion looked into the survey results conducted for this report (discussed further on), showing that Facebook is the platform where people report seeing the most online bullying. Other social sites, such as Ask.fm and Snapchat, were seen as more important platform to focus on.

These social media sites are linked to a person's Facebook profile, and allow users to ask questions, share pictures and open themselves up to anonymous responses.

The discussion looked into more detailed law cases around Australia in terms of online and public harassment cases, as well as finding ways on how the law can be applied to address cyberbullying issues in the NT. More information on this broadcasting can be found on the DVD attached to the hard copy of this report, or by following the footnoted links below<sup>1</sup>.

## Videography

Over the last decade, short movies and documentary films have grown in popularity and in creating awareness as well as impact on the community. Some of the advantages of short movies and documentary films are their greater potential for exploration, innovation and integration. Using pictures or interviews with people involved in cyberbullying cases around the NT, and converting them into a short movie or documentary, can improve public awareness of the presence of cyberbullying in the Territory.

Young Territorians studying at Charles Darwin University agreed to work together in making short movies and a documentary on bullying and cyberbullying. In August 2014, the group developed a short five minute video underlining an example of unintentional bullying in a workplace. The video, titled 'Words Matter', was based on a true story experienced by one of the group members. The short video was aimed to show the power of words, and how easy it is to misjudge someone. The main message from the short video is that while words can give people hope, improper use of it may deeply hurt someone more than it is imagined. Further information on the short video can be found on the DVD attached to the hard copy of this report, or follow the links mentioned in the footnote below<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the short movie, a documentary was also made in collaboration with Beia Capaque, an Information and Technology major student from the Charles Darwin University. Together with Beia, a short documentary on cyberbullying was created and premiered in November 2014. The documentary, titled 'Beating the Bash-board', featured interviews with

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<sup>1</sup> Radio: Modern Day Cyber Bullying Awareness - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAOT6NEf6j4>

<sup>2</sup> Short video: Words matter - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ryvLbTqZuU>

young people around the Territory on cyberbullying issues they faced. The main person highlighted in this film is a young Territorian girl who encountered online bullying that led to depression and had to sacrifice her relationship with family and friends, as well as her school grades, so that she can live a normal life. She was pleased from being able to share her tragic story and help make a difference in the community. However, a nickname of Marsha was given to her as she does not want her identity to be revealed in public. More information on the story and documentary can be found on the DVD attached to the hard copy of this report.

### **Seminars and Workshop**

Seminars and workshops are generally designed in the form of lectures and information sharing, or combination of these methods in interactive ways. As the topic of cyberbullying can create more heated discussion, even conflicts of ideas, merely evaluation on the progress of finding a coping strategy, it is vital that workshops and seminars are geared towards dialogues and open discussion.

Together with Multicultural Youth Northern Territory (MyNT) a workshop on cyberbullying was organised within their Kaleidoscope Youth Leadership Summit at Mount Bundy Station, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2014. This summit is the only one of its kind in NT, and unites leaders of youth organisations around NT aimed at creating positive change in participant's communities.

The workshop in this summit was highly beneficial as it provided participants with opportunity to enhance awareness on one of the main issues facing young people in the Territory, as well as to contribute to finding appropriate ways to address the issue. The summit was attended by young people, aged 15 to 25, who are living in different parts of the NT.

### **THE NEED FOR RESEARCH**

Even though the amount of published data on cyberbullying in Australia has been increasing over the past few years, it is still in its early stages. Little is still known on what kind of

coping strategies young people, especially in NT, can rely on, and to what extent they have been effective.

Kids Helpline, an Australian online and telephone counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 25, has gathered data on traditional bullying for over 10 years. In July 2008, they commenced a collection of additional data specifically relating to cyberbullying. This was in response to the increasing number of young people who contact the helpline specifically relating to this new form of harassment. In their research they point out that most young people are quite aware of how to stay safe online and what options are available to prevent cyberbullying (Price and Dalglish 2010). However, cyberbullying still bring up stronger emotions such as anxiety, fear, guilt and hopelessness compare to traditional bullying.

This year, the Chief Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians had decided to support additional research into the area of cyberbullying in order to understand the issue further.

The core objectives of the research are to:

- Understand the occurrence of different forms of cyberbullying
- Identify short-term impacts of cyberbullying
- Identify coping strategies used by young people online and offline
- Understand which strategies young people consider to be effective.

It is hoped that this research is able to provide evidence to inform young people, parents, schools and government on the nature of cyberbullying in NT and what strategies can be taken to effectively address this issue.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (SURVEY)**

The research undertaken in the format of a survey applied a mixed-method online approach, consisting of 18 web-based questions (16 quantitative and two qualitative questions). The online approach was chosen because of the ease in reaching a targeted sample, familiarity to the target group and its anonymity and privacy allows young people to feel more comfortable in discussing sensitive issues (Mallen et al. 2005).

The analysis was applied on samples consisted of 48 self-identified cyberbully victims aged less than 25 years old. Participants were sourced primarily from a school website and email counselling services, as well as other public youth media. No parental consent was required in the survey process, as the survey took place via the Internet and was anonymous. It was believed that requiring parental consent may have discouraged some young people from participating, particularly those who are most at risk of being cyberbullied and fear that the technology they used may be monitored or prevented. Although great caution was taken in designing questions to prevent participants from being re-traumatised by the case of cyberbullying, contact details for Kids Helpline and Lifeline were included in the survey to offer support if needed.

Questions were specially designed for the purpose of this study, taking into consideration the nature of the research, wide variety of age groups, and literacy levels of the target groups. Languages used in the survey were developed in consultation with experienced youth coordinators of community organisations in the NT. Pilot testing was conducted online with six young people. The learnings obtained from qualitative responses were considered to improve the survey. The research was conducted in two separate parts, in which the first part was conducted from May until June 2014, and the second was from September to October 2014.

## PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

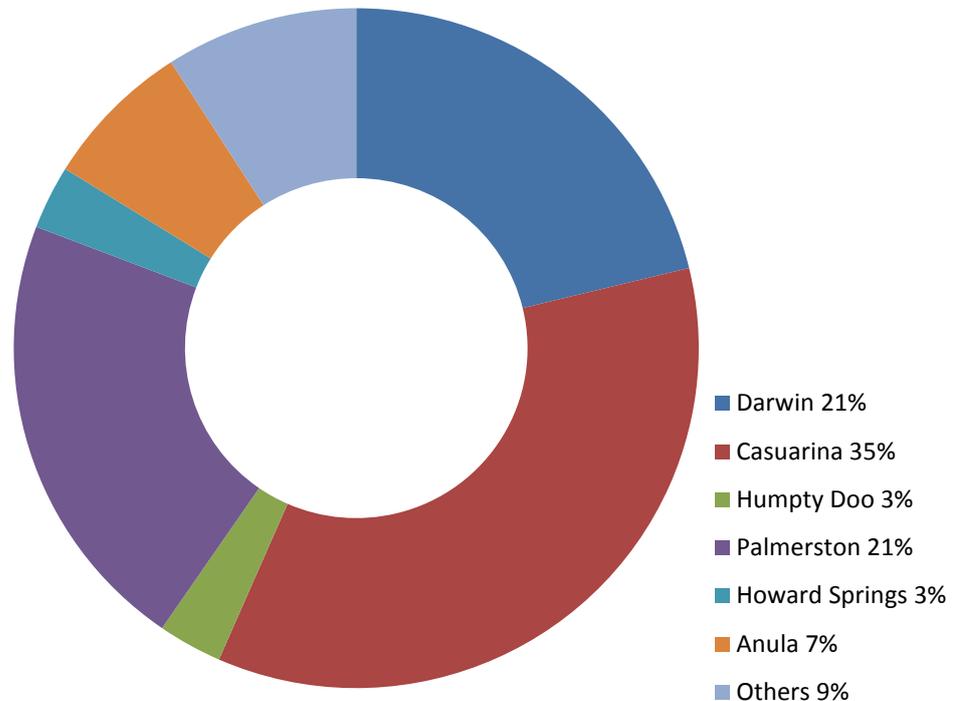
Out of 48 participants, the majority were aged 21 -25 years (36%) or 18 - 21 (34%). Table 1 shows the full breakdown of participants.

*Table 1: Age and gender of participants*

	Male	Female
12 – 15 yrs	3	2
15 – 18 yrs	4	5
18 – 21 yrs	6	10
21 – 25 yrs	9	8
Total	23	25

With regard to the geographic distribution of young people living in the Territory, a representative spread was achieved across the sample.

*Figure 1: Geographic spread of participants*



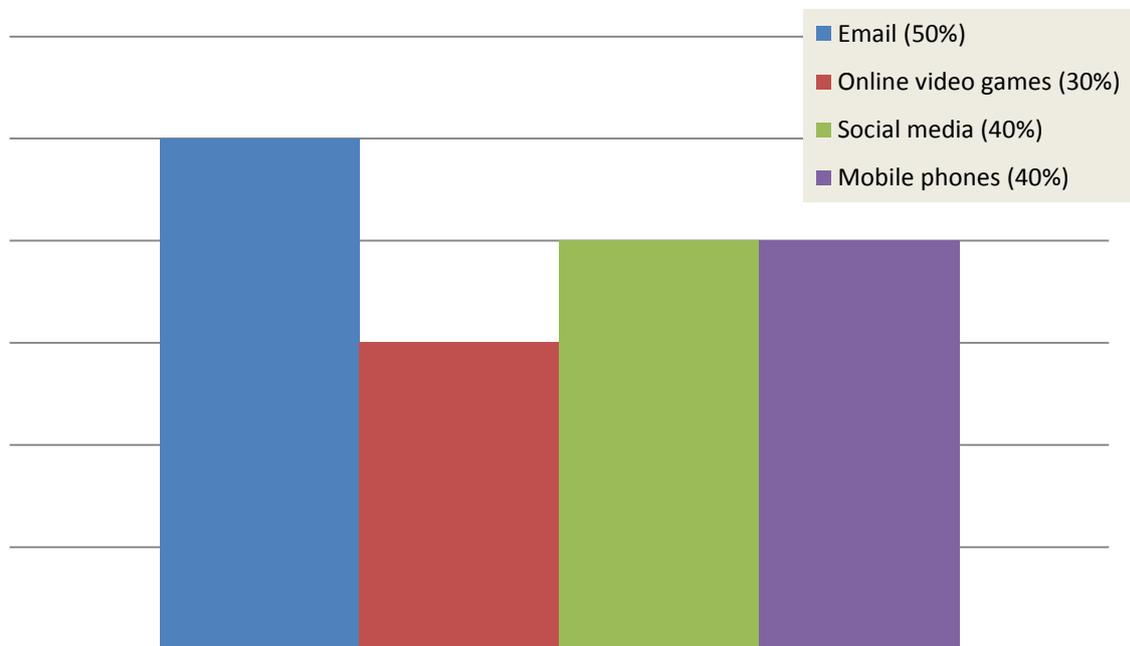
## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overall, findings from the research indicates that cyberbullying can occur at multiple stages of a young persons' life, often with severe and negative impacts. A snapshot of the research findings has been listed below. Many of these findings appear consistent with contemporary international research.

### Forms of cyberbullying

Of the 48 young people surveyed, cyberbullying was found to most commonly occur during their teenage years. Specifically, 40% were cyberbullied when 15-18 years and 60% during the ages 19-21 years. The percentages reflect the multiple age groups at which an individual can experience cyberbullying.

Figure 2: The most common situations for cyberbullying



Across the sample, the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying were name calling (80%), threat or abusive comments (60%) and spreading rumours (70%). Whilst name calling showed little difference by age or gender, abusive comments were found to be significantly more common among victims aged 15-18 years. Females reported significantly higher levels of being victimised by spreading of rumours and having their opinions ‘slammed’ online.

### Impacts of cyberbullying

The majority of participants reported that the cyberbullying had impacted them in various ways. The most common areas of impact included scared (80%), embarrassed (70%) and friendships (20%). Notably, 30% reported a negative effect on their school grades, 20% on school attendance and 10% on family relationships.

The emotional response of young people varied among participants. Of the emotions tested, sadness and anger were most common (60% and 70% respectively). In addition to these, 30% of participants reported experiencing other emotions including loneliness,

confusion, anxiety, betrayal and guilt. Furthermore, 10% reported having suicidal thoughts and claimed engaged in self-harming behaviour as a result of cyberbullying.

### Use and effectiveness of coping strategies

Almost all survey respondents had tried at least one strategy to cope with the cyberbullying, many of whom had tried a number of different strategies. Informing someone was found to be a common and effective response to cyberbullying. More than 70% of participants had used a form of online intervention to try to stop the cyberbullying (e.g. blocking, removing friends, changing own account name). Among these strategies, blocking was found to be most effective, followed by removing the bully from their friends list.

Offline, the use of coping strategies were not as common. Despite their reported “effectiveness”, telling a friend or family member about the issue were strategies used by less than half of the participants (30% and 40% respectively). Males used this strategy much less than females. Table 1 provides a summary of the various offline strategies and their reported effectiveness.

*Table 2: The effectiveness of telling someone*

Outcome	Participants
The bullying stopped altogether	30%
The bullying did not stop	60%
The bullying did not stop (got worse)	50%
The bullying stopped (but restarted)	50%
Stopped looking	70%
Nothing changes	30%
Conduct revenge	10%

Qualitative analysis and thematic coding of the advice young people claimed they would give to others experiencing cyberbullying found some contrasting recommendations, as well as many similarities. Interestingly, speaking out was one of the more common themes, despite of its low usage.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the phenomenon of cyberbullying from a youth perspective. It shows that numerous adolescents repeatedly fall victim to cyberbullying through name calling, abuse, harassment, impersonation, and public humiliation. Although the study revealed a high proportion of female victims compared to males, it is unclear if this is truly indicated the gender split or simply just a reflection trends. Therefore, where boys tend to be the primary perpetrators and victims of traditional bullying, online it is girls who seem to dominate the statistics as both victims and bullies.

One of the most interesting findings is that cyberbullying most commonly occurs within the secondary years. While it must be noted that majority of the sample came from this age band (15–18 years), reports from older participants still support this claim. Parents, community and schools would do well to recognise this finding and ensure that support and guidance are given during these critical years.

This research provides support to a number of international findings. In many cases the bully known to the victims and technological platforms is just one of many environments they may be using to bully their victims (Katzner et al. 2009). Additionally, this research points out that young people are often not simply regarded as a ‘bully’ or ‘victim’, rather at various times they may be bullied while, at the same time, becoming a bully or act as a bystander to bullying (Kulig et al. 2008). With the strong inter-relatedness between various forms of bullying, school and government interventions should focus not only on cyber-safety but also the quality of peer relationships.

With regard to short-term impacts, the high number of victims reporting negative effects on their self-confidence, esteem, relationships, school grades and attendance highlight that cyberbullying should not be ignored. The levels of extreme sadness and anger reported, as well as associations made to self-harming and suicidal thoughts, has supported this finding. Moreover, they reinforce the importance of ensuring that cyberbullying complaints are not minimised, and that strength-based support and guidance is provided to young people.

One of the challenges in providing support is the fact that only a minority of victims are choosing to speak out to either adults or peers about their experience. Although it is not explored in this research, based on interaction with many young people it can be assumed that reluctance to talk with adults may be due to some barriers, including the fear and perceived effectiveness of speaking out. It may also be that young people need further information regarding the benefits of seeking help, how to and who they can safely turn to for support.

Peers, parents and schools can all play a role in encouraging this behaviour. Further research in this area can be useful to investigate what strategies are currently in place to encourage victims to speak out. Consideration should also be given to young people who are using revenge as a coping strategy. Although only a minority of the participants reported trying to employ this measure, their reports of how effective it is to retaliate can send a wrong message that may persuade them to create further bullying behaviour.

Finally, the majority of young people were found to be familiar with online intervention tools. Among many different online tools, the popular use of the blocking techniques suggest that the reinforcement of this response is likely to be the most appropriate strategy for parents and schools, especially for its less disruptive for victims than other alternatives. Additionally, with the growing presence of social networking sites in daily activities of young people in the NT, it is considered essential that strategies on how to protect themselves from online bullies need to be thoroughly formulated and disseminated.

## Limitations

While this study provides a number of interesting insights into cyberbullying, there are several limitations to consider when analysing the overall result of the study. Firstly, due to the sample bias towards young people in the NT aged 12 to 25 years, generalisation of the results should not extend beyond this group.

Similarly, while the study took benefit from the use of an online data collection method, the inflexibility around the survey and inability to verify authenticity of the data must be considered.

## CONCLUSION

The current study provides a good basis for understanding cyberbullying in Australia, particularly in regard to the use and perceived effectiveness of coping strategies used by young Territorians. The findings reveal both reassuring and concerning aspects of cyberbullying, with a highlight that a critical response to effectively address cyberbullying relies on not only the help-seeking behaviour of the victims, but also improving the helpfulness of those they speak to. Even though evidence suggests that cyberbullying presents its own unique set of characteristics, it is also important to remember it is still heavily related to the traditional bullying, in which the need for interventions to focus on improving family, friends, and peer relationship in general.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the NT Government:

1. provide technical assistance and training initiatives, including seminars for teachers, administrators, parents, students, and others in the community on how to recognise and respond to online misconduct and cyber-bullying;
2. fund research into the nature and magnitude of the bullying/cyber-bullying problem in the NT, specifically its impact on both the social and emotional health of students as well as the impact on their academic achievement; and
3. provide resources for parents and adult family members to inform them on the possibility and occurrences of cases of bullying on social networking sites and through cell phone use.

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