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Cyberbullying and Internet Safety, Waterbury CT

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Cyberbullying and Internet Safety

Waterbury CT

Gia Coleman

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Tricia Harrity

Cyberbullying and Need for Intervention

- Cyberbullying has become a growing public health concern with the rising interest and use of social media applications. This occurs mostly in the adolescent population but can continue through to college and adulthood.
- Some important differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying include:
 - Students experiences cyberbullying can also be cyberbullies themselves
 - Girls are more likely to be involved with cyberbullying.
 - Cyberbullying doesn't just reach students at school but at home as well.
 - **Students experiencing cyberbullying are 2x more likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders than those experiencing traditional bullying.**

Costs

- Health Care:
 - Students experiencing cyberbullying are twice as likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders and attempt suicide. Treatment of these psychiatric disorders can require intensive therapy, medications, and in emergencies can even require hospitalization.
- Community:
 - Students who are being bullied are more likely to avoid going to school due to intimidation/anxiety. As a result their grades drop and students are more likely to drop out. Students who are caught bullying often receive suspensions as punishment. These absences, suspensions and drop outs can cause a significant drain on a school district's financial resources.
 - One article estimated these costs for a 1000 student school to be greater than two million dollars per year.

Interviews/ Community Perspective

- Interview with *Name withheld* (Teacher at Gilmartin Middle School) and *Name withheld* (Americorps Leader of YHCS at Gilmartin Middle School)
 - The schools are recognizing this as a concern and have implemented programs/assemblies to educate students. They are also working to hire a separate social worker for each school in the district so that someone will be available to students on a full-time basis. Other interventions include having a bullying box in the office for people to report bullying anonymously. Students caught bullying receive the maximum punishment which is 10 days suspension.
 - It is impossible to monitor every student's facebook account and cellphone. Plus a lot of it happens at home.
 - The students need role models.
- Interview with *Name withheld* (Americorps Leader of YHCS at Kaynor Tech High School and Kennedy High School)
 - Girls tend to be more involved as both victim and bully. They often shame each other.
 - Many teachers/parents don't realize how serious an issue this is. This isn't just name calling and calling someone "stupid" or making something up about them like we used to have. Students are really mean and hurtful to each other and this can happen 24/7, not just at school.
 - Medical professionals need to educate people who work with students on how to recognize bullying and the effects it has on mental health.

Intervention

- A 1 hour interactive presentation on cyberbullying and internet safety for middle school students.
 - Included definition of cyberbullying, impact on students and bystanders and what someone can do if they are being bullied.
 - Included a discussion of social contracts and an activity to create their own social contract/rules for using the internet.
 - Included a discussion of other safety tips for internet use.

Results/Response

- The students enjoyed the presentation and were eager to participate.
- The teachers appreciated the presentation and recognize cyberbullying as a growing concern.
- The students already knew a lot about cyberbullying and knew how to report it but felt that it wasn't realistic to report it due to feeling "like a snitch" and feeling like the administration doesn't do enough about it.

Evaluation of Effectiveness/Limitations

- The audience was small (8-9 students).
- This intervention is a one time intervention. A longitudinal intervention might be more effective with emphasis on emotional regulation and peer victimization.
- A lot of these issues the students face are personal and it is difficult to have them open up when the setting is in a classroom with multiple other students.

Recommendations for future projects

- **Interactive Small Groups:** Having students discuss their own experiences with cyberbullying and their feelings about it. Having the school guidance counselor present would be helpful for follow-up with the students in a longitudinal capacity.
- **Locating Mentorship/Big Sib programs and connecting them with high risk schools/students:** This would provide the students with a safe person to talk to about these topics and their feelings as well as providing a responsible role model.

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