

# **The Experiences of Adolescents regarding Cyberbullying**

by

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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## ABSTRACT

### The experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying

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**SUPERVISOR:** Dr MP le Roux  
**DEGREE:** MSW (Play Therapy)  
**INSTITUTION:** University of Pretoria

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Bullying has been a problem affecting children for decades. The past two decades have seen an increased use of electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones for interpersonal communication. Electronic communication has virtually unlimited availability, accessibility and anonymity and these characteristics have enabled traditional face-to-face bullying to translate into the online world, resulting in what is known as cyberbullying. It has been found that adolescents spend as much time interacting by means of electronic media as they do in their face-to-face interactions, which increases their chances of being exposed to cyberbullying.

The goal of the research was to explore the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying. A qualitative research approach was utilised in order to obtain the information on the experiences of the adolescents from their personal point of view. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview schedule. Due to the hidden nature of cyberbullying, snowball sampling was utilised to select adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, who attended a secondary school in Gauteng and who were victims of cyberbullying. Ten participants (eight females and two males) formed the sample for the study.

The findings of the study suggested that cyberbullying could have extremely negative emotional, social and educational consequences for the victim. These effects flowed over into other systems, affecting families, the peer group and the victim's school attendance. Friendships were often put to the test as many times the cyberbully came from within the victim's friendship circle. Cyberbullying can be

regarded as a hidden phenomenon as many victims are too afraid to speak out about it. Furthermore, some victims who did report cyberbullying to parents or school authorities experienced that the seriousness of the cyberbullying was not appreciated by the adults.

Based on the findings of this study it is clear that cyberbullying should be regarded as a serious social issue and parents, educators, social workers and other professionals as well as adolescents themselves need to be aware of the dangers of cyberbullying. It is recommended that professionals, such as social workers and educators, need to develop intervention strategies for handling cyberbullying, including strategies to raise awareness of cyberbullying, strategies for reporting it, support for victims and perpetrators, and formulating school policies and procedures to deal with the phenomenon.

## **KEY CONCEPTS**

- Adolescent
- Cyberbullying
- Bullying
- Electronic media
- Types of cyberbullying
- Types of bullying
- Effects of cyberbullying
- Effects of bullying

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#### **LIST OF ADDENDA**

**Addendum A:** Data collection instrument (Semi-structured interview schedule)

**Addendum B:** Letter of informed assent

**Addendum C:** Letter of informed consent

**Addendum D:** Letter of permission to conduct research from the Gauteng Department of Education

**Addendum E:** Ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria

***“Unless and until our society recognises cyberbullying for what it is, the suffering of thousands of silent victims will continue”***

Anna Maria Chavez (2014)

## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades bullying has received detailed attention by professionals due to its increasing occurrence and the negative emotional and health effects it has on adolescents (Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:64; Vieno, Gini & Santinello, 2011:393). Bullying can be defined as harmful actions (physical or emotional) which are repeated over time against an individual who cannot defend him or herself (Goossens & Jackson, 2006:187). Bullying can be categorised into physical bullying (hitting, kicking, punching and taking or damaging belongings) and verbal bullying (teasing, taunting and threatening). Both of these are seen as direct (overt) bullying. There is also relational bullying (to damage someone's reputation, relationships or self-image) which is seen as indirect (covert) bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). In recent years, bullying has evolved from face-to-face methods to virtual methods (Ang & Goh, 2010:388), known as cyberbullying.

In South Africa, one out of five people have a "smart phone", a phone which can access the Internet and social networking sites (Van Rooyen, 2012:7) and over two million people in South Africa use the Internet for social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Ferreira, 2012:10). In recent years, the use of electronic devices by adolescents, such as computers and mobile telephones has increased (Baer, Green, Hong & Saran, 2012:729; Li, 2006:2; Louw & Louw, 2007:264; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147).

Among adolescents, those between the ages of 11 and 18/21 (Louw, Louw & Ferns, 2007:279; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:429), electronic media devices are used to make new friends, communicate with existing friends and search for information for both academic and personal use (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:800). However, due to the availability, convenience and sense of anonymity created by such technology,

harmful uses of technology, with negative effects on youth, may occur (Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:1; Snakenborg, Von Acker & Gable, 2011:89). The transmission of cruel and embarrassing texts and pictures between adolescents have been on the increase in recent years and form part of cyberbullying which has been described as “a complex and disturbing 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon” (Burnham, Wright & Houser, 2011:2) and as one of the fastest growing forms of bullying happening world-wide (Cart, 2010:34).

Similar to bullying, cyberbullying is also defined as aggressive, intentional acts by a group or an individual, aimed at a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russel & Tippett, 2008:376; Slonje & Smith, 2010:147). Cyberbullying behaviours are often similar to that of traditional bullying; however, cyberbullying makes use of electronic media to bully victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615).

Cyberbullying is therefore bullying that takes place through the use of electronic media which includes e-mail, instant messaging, mobile phones, social networking sites and video and online gaming (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011:275). Authors (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147) refer to cyberbullying as bullying through the use of technology, such as mobile phones and the Internet. The Internet encompasses social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, e-mails, webcams, online gaming, chat rooms, instant messaging and interactive web journals (Burnham et al., 2011:4; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2).

A study by Dempsey, Nichols, Storch and Sulkowski (2009:962) to measure adolescents’ Internet and mobile phone use, showed that 90% of the adolescents that participated in the study used the Internet. Of that, 50% used it on a daily basis and almost 70% of the participants had their own personal mobile phone. These figures highlight adolescents’ widespread exposure to various technologies.

The researcher became aware from personal experience at her workplace, that many adolescents made use of BlackBerry’s messaging programme known as “BBM” (Blackberry Messenger). Another messaging programme popular among South Africa’s youth is known as MXit. According to a study conducted in 2006, 1.6

million people were using this application, the majority of who were below the age of 18 (Louw & Louw, 2007:264).

There are characteristics that set cyberbullying apart from traditional bullying. Cyberbullies can remain anonymous as they can easily change their name and e-mail to hide their identity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148). This anonymity allows cyberbullies to feel invincible and untouchable, which increases the risk that they will take advantage of others (Burnham et al., 2011:5).

Furthermore, there is a physical distance separating the cyberbully and the victim, making it easier for the cyberbully to be cruel, malevolent and nasty through the use of text messages, instant messages and e-mails. This also allows the bully to say things that he or she would not otherwise have the courage to say personally to the victim (Adams, 2010:45; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615).

Social norms, rules, morals and laws are rendered less relevant during the use of electronic media (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615). In other words, the cyberbully may be less aware or even oblivious to the extent of the damage or the consequences caused by his or her actions. Although they may believe that they are being humorous or providing a form of entertainment for others, their actions may be interpreted as a lack of empathy (Twyman, Saylor, Taylor & Comeaux, 2010:195).

With cyberbullying, there is no escape from the bullying for the potential victim. Adolescents are very rarely without their mobile phones and can be harassed through text messages and e-mails at any time of the day or night (Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Twyman et al., 2010:195).

The potential audience of cyberbullying is greater than that of traditional bullying as a result of the enormous number of users accessing popular electronic media such as the Internet and social networking sites, not to mention access to instant messaging platforms such as BBM and MXit. Information is also distributed widely and quickly (Kowalski & Limber, 2008:823; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Twyman et al., 2010:195). For example, once content (such as a comment, status, picture or video, or even a broadcast message to multiple recipients) has been written on the Internet, a social

networking site or an instant messaging programme, it is almost impossible to erase it and it can be viewed, shared and redistributed by millions of people (Adams, 2010:45).

Often, adolescents' use of their computers and mobile phones is unsupervised (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:497; Twyman et al., 2010:199). This contributes towards the prevalence of adolescents exposed to abusive and hurtful comments, vicious threats and invasion of privacy that forms part of the risks and dangers of online activities (Welrave & Heirman, 2011:42). The unsupervised use of computers and mobile phones means that parents are often oblivious to the bullying that their children may be facing. In addition, adolescents are reluctant to share this information with their parents or a person of authority (Slonje & Smith, 2008:152).

Cyberbullying can have far-reaching consequences. For the victim, the consequences of cyberbullying include lowered self-esteem and self-confidence, depression, loss of friendships, a drop in school performance and school attendance, as well as strained family relationships (Dempsey et al., 2009:964; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:64; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:55; Twyman et al., 2010:196). These consequences may have substantial long-term effects on the life of the adolescent (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:64). Certain consequences have been noted to be as serious as self-harm behaviours or even suicide and there has been an increase in the link between cyberbullying and school shootings (Adams, 2010:49; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:64; Burnham et al., 2011:7; Cart, 2010:34; Kopple, 2011:48; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:52).

Both the victim and the bully suffer as a result of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616). There is often an underlying reason behind the bully's aggression and if this underlying reason is not addressed, bullies may continue to present with antisocial behaviour which hinders their ability to function adequately in society (Adams, 2010:47; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:51).

Although cyberbullying can affect a person of any age, adolescent cases are predominately reported (Twyman et al., 2010:195). During adolescence, identity

development is extremely important (Berk, 2013:460; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Santrock, 2009:385). The development of an adolescent's identity occurs as they make decisions regarding their own character, their likes and dislikes, what makes them different from others and what they plan to do with their lives (Santrock, 2009:385). The process of identity development is largely dependent on their interaction with their peers and cues from their social environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615). Adolescents have a strong need to belong to a peer group and be accepted. This need for belonging can contribute to adolescents' engagement with electronic media, thereby making them more vulnerable to exposure to cyberbullying.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory served as the theoretical framework in this study. This theory states that a child develops within a complex system of relationships which are affected by the surrounding environment. Relationships and the environment are constantly changing (Berk, 2013:26; Keenan & Evans, 2009:35). The systems have a direct influence on each other and will thus affect each other when there are changes or when something new is introduced (Berk, 2013:29).

The systems of an individual can include and extend beyond home, school, neighbourhood, social and cultural institutions and any other settings in which one spends their everyday life, as well as the people with whom one comes into contact with (Keenan & Evans, 2009:35). The microsystem includes the activities and the interaction patterns of an individual in the contexts in which he or she is directly involved. These systems usually include the home, school and neighbourhood. The mesosystem encompasses connections between the microsystems. The exosystem includes the contexts with which the individual has no direct contact, but that could still have an effect on the individual. For the child, the exosystem may, for example, include the work setup of the parent. The macrosystem consists of cultural values, laws, policies and resources and, finally, the chronosystem indicates that change in all systems occurs over time (Berk, 2013:29).

Due to the increase in children's use of electronic media (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:800; Dempsey et al., 2009:970; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147) electronic media could be viewed as a system of its own. Harper (2007:269) refers to social networking sites such as Facebook as a community in itself.

Bronfenbrenner explained that the systems are all interrelated and what happens in one system will have an influence and effect on other systems (Keenan & Evans, 2009:36). In the same way, O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011:801) explain that a child's life within electronic media use becomes an extension of other areas of his or her life, thereby becoming interrelated with the other systems in the child's life.

This system of electronic media, or the cyber-system, is very important to adolescents and they have a need to have access to their electronic media for a considerable portion of the day; spending hours online and connected with other individuals. (Cohen, 2011:140; Ratner, 2012:50). In relation to Bronfenbrenner's theory, the changes and experiences within this electronic media system should then have an effect on other systems that the adolescent is involved in. Experiences within the cyber-system, whether positive or negative, are likely to influence an adolescent's functioning in other systems.

The researcher would like to explore the experiences of adolescents within the electronic media system as well as how it affects their functioning within the other systems in their environment. The ecological systems theory is therefore regarded as applicable to the study.

### **1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Bullying is a long-standing problem with extremely harmful effects (Feinberg & Robey, 2009:26; Twyman et al., 2010:195). In a recent study of over 7000 learners in South African schools, more than one third of these learners identified bullying as the schools' most serious problem (Magome, 2012:1). Cyberbullying is similar to traditional bullying in that the same abusive behaviours and emotional and physical

effects are experienced by a person in both instances (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Twyman et al., 2010:196). However, cyberbullying occurs through electronic media, such as computers and mobile phones (Burnham et al., 2011:4; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). A well-known market research company reported that cyberbullying is on the increase in South African schools (More than half bullied at school, 2013).

Cyberbullying has specific characteristics which set it apart from traditional bullying, namely the cyberbully can have total anonymity, there is a physical distance between the bully and the victim, the content can reach an extremely large audience in cyberspace and cyberbullying can be seen as a hidden phenomenon (Adams, 2010:45; Burnham et al., 2011:5; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615, Kowalski & Limber, 2008:823; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148). Similar to traditional bullying, victims of cyberbullying may experience low self-esteem and a lack of confidence, may become disinterested in family, friends, school and hobbies, experience heightened anxiety, embarrassment and humiliation, as well as fear and panic (Dempsey et al., 2009:964; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:64; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:497; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:55; Twyman et al., 2010:196).

There has been an increasing number of extreme cases of school violence, self-harm and suicides due to cyberbullying (Adams, 2010:49; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:64; Burnham et al., 2011:7; Cart, 2010:34; Kopple, 2011:48; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2; Magome, 2012:1; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:52). Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of and educate parents, social workers, educators, and other professionals, and adolescents about the effects and complexities of cyberbullying (Burnham et al., 2011:7; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:619; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:8; Twyman et al., 2010:199; Wright, Burnham, Inman & Ogorchock, 2009:35).

During the literature review, the researcher noted that numerous articles regarding cyberbullying stressed the need for further research (Baer et al., 2012:733; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:69; Burnham et al., 2011:26; Cart, 2010:33; Dempsey et al., 2009:962; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:51; Twyman et al., 2010:199; Welrave & Heirman, 2011:69). The researcher discovered that the majority of the articles she consulted

focused on the occurrence and extent of cyberbullying and thus believed that these aspects have been well-documented and described. The researcher identified a gap in local studies regarding the experiences of people exposed to cyberbullying and this study was intended to address this gap by gaining knowledge of the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying. The following research question was formulated for the study: What are the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying?

## **1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

The following goal and objectives were set for this study:

### **1.4.1 Goal**

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying.

### **1.4.2 Objectives**

- To explore the meaning of the concept “cyberbullying”.
- To explore and describe what the participants regard as cyberbullying.
- To explore and describe the different types of cyberbullying that participants were exposed to.
- To determine and report on the participants’ views on the effects of cyberbullying on themselves.
- To explore and describe the involvement of participants in the cyberbullying of others.
- To determine and report on what the participants regard as solutions to cyberbullying.
- To make recommendations for social workers, parents and other professionals regarding awareness and education about cyberbullying.

## 1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The researcher decided on a qualitative research approach in order to be able to obtain richer and more personal information from participants based on their point of view (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:64). This study was based on applied research in order to address a situation in practice, and was exploratory in nature (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94-95). The researcher made use of a collective case study research design (Neuman, 2011:177) to collect and compare data obtained through interviews with ten participants.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the participants for this study were selected by means of purposive and snowball sampling (Neuman, 2011:269; Rubin & Babbie, 2010:147), from the population of adolescents enrolled at a secondary school in the Tshwane area. All ten participants had been victims of cyberbullying, were between the ages of 13 and 18, were both male and female, and were culturally diverse. The researcher conducted a pilot study with one participant who did not form part of the study.

Data was collected by means of semi-structured, one-to-one interviews guided by an interview schedule (Greeff, 2011:342). The interview schedule was compiled after a thorough literature review to identify main themes surrounding the phenomenon of cyberbullying. The researcher explored additional themes that arose during interviews with the participants. These interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants as well as their parents. The researcher also ensured to take detailed notes during the interviews.

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed. The researcher made use of the data analysis spiral as represented by Creswell (in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:403), in which data was prepared, organised, reduced and presented into themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. At all times, the researcher followed measures to ensure that the information obtained in the study was credible and authentic, for example, by making sure that she understood the participants

correctly with regards to the information that they were providing and keeping an audit trail of all actions pertaining to this study.

## 1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are relevant to the study:

*Cyberbullying* is bullying that takes place via electronic media and involves repeated harm willingly inflicted on a victim, including name calling, teasing, taunting, harmful stories, lies, rumours, threats of violence or death and embarrassing or sexually explicit pictures or videos posted without the consent of the victim (Miller & Hufstедler, 2009:2). Feinberg and Robey (2009:26) explain that cyberbullying can also include stalking, impersonation, trickery and exclusion.

*Adolescence* is the life stage between childhood and adulthood. The stage of adolescence occurs between the ages of approximately 11 and 18/21 (Louw et al., 2007:279; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:429).

## 1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher views the following aspects as limitations of the study:

- The sample size was small and the research was only conducted at one school, therefore the results cannot be generalised to other contexts.
- Participants were predominantly from two racial groups and it is therefore not known how adolescents from other racial groups would experience cyberbullying.

## 1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINE

### **Chapter 1: General introduction to the research study**

This chapter provides a general introduction to the research. The researcher contextualised the study, explained the goals and objectives of the study and provided a brief overview of the research methodology.

### **Chapter 2: Cyberbullying and the adolescent**

In Chapter 2, the researcher presents a thorough literature review in order to fully describe the phenomenon of cyberbullying and also provide a description of the developmental phase of adolescence.

### **Chapter 3: Research methodology and empirical findings**

In Chapter 3, the research methodology and ethical considerations relevant to the study are described and the research findings are presented.

### **Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations**

Chapter 4 concludes the research report and captures the key findings, as well as conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### CYBERBULLYING AND THE ADOLESCENT

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Bullying (or traditional bullying) has been a problem affecting children for decades (Diamanduros, Downs & Jenkins, 2008:693; Roberts & Ali, 2013:6; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5). Bullying can be defined as an aggressive, intentional behaviour which causes emotional or physical harm to a person perceived by the perpetrator to be vulnerable or where there is a perceived imbalance of power (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012:2353; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Shaw & Cross, 2012:142).

There are various forms of traditional bullying namely physical, verbal and relational bullying (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5; Stauffer, Heath, Coyne & Ferrin, 2012:353). It has been proven that bullying has an extremely negative impact on an individual's emotions, self-esteem, relationships and their academic performance (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Shaw & Cross, 2012:142; Stauffer et al., 2012:354). For this reason, bullying has received much attention over the last two decades (Naruskov, Luik, Nocentini & Menesini, 2012:323; Rigby, 2010:4; Smith, 2011:37).

At the same time, the past two decades have seen phenomenal advances in technology (Ratner, 2012:50; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Stauffer et al., 2012:354). There has been an increase in the use of electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones (Baer et al., 2012:729; Li, 2006:2; Louw & Louw, 2007:264; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). The use of "smart phones" by adolescents is rapidly increasing (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012:2353; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Stauffer et al., 2012:354). These phones allow one access to the Internet and other social networking sites. Adolescents have built up a strong reliance on these technologies to a point where they are very rarely seen without a smart phone in their possession (Strom & Strom, 2012:48; Thomas & McGee, 2012:19). As

indicated by Badenhorst (2011:1), “[t]his has significantly changed the way in which children communicate with each other, and about each other.”

About 10 years ago many social theorists predicted that the Internet would revolutionise social relationships (Carter, 2004:109; Cassim, 2013:1). This statement can be seen as correct if one considers that today’s adolescents spend as much time interacting online as they do in their face-to-face interactions (Agosto, Forte & Magee, 2012:38). Such technology has unlimited availability, accessibility and anonymity (Miller & Hufstедler, 2009:1; Wright et al., 2009:3). These characteristics have enabled traditional face-to-face bullying to evolve online, resulting in what is known as cyberbullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008:693; Naruskov et al., 2012:324; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Stauffer et al., 2012:354).

Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of technological communication devices to intentionally and wilfully harm others (Diamanduros et al., 2008:693; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5). Cyberbullying is used as a means to damage a person’s social status, relationships and reputation, as well as to maliciously cause chaos in the victim’s life (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Willard, 2006:55). Goff (2011:177) adds leverage to this thinking, arguing that cyberbullying is “potentially more malicious and damaging to the health and well-being of young people and increasingly more difficult for schools to deal with.”

Badenhorst (2011:5) refers to two studies on the prevalence of cyberbullying in South Africa. First, The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in South Africa conducted a pilot study in 2009 among 1 726 young people between the ages of 12 and 24 years. The study found that almost half of the respondents (46.8%) had experienced some form of cyberbullying. Another South African study among 1 594 primary and secondary school learners indicated that 36% of the respondents had experienced some form of cyberbullying.

In this chapter the researcher will focus on the different types, characteristics and consequences of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying, with an additional focus on the latter. A discussion of traditional bullying serves to contextualise

cyberbullying within the broader context of bullying behaviours. The researcher will also provide a detailed overview of adolescence as a life stage.

## **2.2 THE PHENOMENON OF BULLYING**

The numerous causes of bullying, the different role players in bullying as well as the categories of bullying will be discussed in this section.

### **2.2.1 The definition of bullying**

Bullying can be defined as aggressive, intentional, negative actions taken by an individual or a group of individuals repeatedly and over time against victims who are, or are perceived to be weaker or unable to defend themselves (Naruskov et al., 2012:323; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Shaw & Cross, 2012:142; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Stauffer et al., 2012:353).

In order for bullying to occur, there must be an imbalance of power where the bully is in a position of power over the victim. The bully may be physically strong or quick with thoughts and words that the bully knows would hurt the victim. Alternatively the bully may have stronger social skills than the victim and/or be friends with other adolescents who support bullying behaviours (Naruskov et al., 2012:325; Rigby, 2010:13; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:53). Ultimately, bullying is a repeated act rather than a singular event, where the victims are perceived to be weak and unable to defend themselves (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:32). There are various factors that contribute towards bullying and these require attention in order to fully understand the phenomenon (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010:90; Dixon, 2011:32).

### **2.2.2 Causes of bullying**

In order to determine the causes of bullying, one should consider the individual characteristics of the bully, familial and interpersonal relationships, the school environment, as well as society and community circumstances (Smith, 2011:32).

### 2.2.2.1 Individual characteristics of the bully

Individual characteristics of the bully include aggression, anti-social behaviour and a lack of empathy.

- **Aggression**

Aggressive behaviours are common in young children between the ages of 18 months and four years, and over time children learn how to act in more appropriate and socially desirable ways to fulfil their needs (Dixon, 2011:32; Rigby, 2010:5; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:32). However, a minority do not do so and continue with aggressive behaviour due to their drive to act aggressively and a lack of corrective influence from adults (Rigby, 2010:5; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:32).

An individual's temperament and personality should be considered when evaluating the causes of bullying (Smith, 2011:32). It is estimated that five per cent of children are likely to act aggressively and in dangerously violent ways (Rigby, 2010:5). Bullies tend to behave more aggressively than other children and they do so consistently (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010:90). Children may also bully others because they lack the ability to manage their emotions and they are unable to control themselves or calm themselves when they are emotionally distressed (Orpinas & Horne, 2010:56). The frustration they may feel at not having these skills can cause them to act in an aggressive manner (Orpinas & Horne, 2010:56). Furthermore, "[t]here is growing evidence to support the fact that violent behaviour amongst youth in school may be due to impaired cognitive development" (Wild & Swartz, 2012:211).

Aggressive behaviour seems to be related to gender: "Aggressive behaviour in boys is more prevalent (and normalised) and is clearly rooted in the social construction of masculinity and femininity" (Hoff & Mitchell, 2010:52). As a result, males are more likely to engage in overt physical bullying, while females are more likely to engage in covert relational bullying (Rigby, 2010:16; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:117). However, girls do engage in physical bullying and, conversely,

boys also take part in relational bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:117).

- **Anti-social behaviour**

Anti-social behaviours are also seen as linked to bullying and are behaviours which may evoke negative responses from others. Behaviours such as a lack of empathy, a dominant personality, low tolerance for frustration and a positive attitude towards violence may form part of the anti-social behaviours of bullies (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:46). These and other anti-social behaviours may develop as a result of the adolescent not having established a healthy balance between time spent at school and time spent at home, as well as having had limited interactions with other children before school-going age (Rigby, 2010:8).

- **Lack of empathy**

Empathy can be described as an ability to understand the feelings of others and how one would feel in a certain situation, as well as understanding the reasons for such feelings (Grobler & Schenck, 2009:52). The capacity for empathy has a positive effect on interpersonal relationships, as it can facilitate pro-social behaviour as well as inhibit anti-social behaviours such as bullying (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141). A lack of empathy has been linked to children and adolescents who display aggressive and anti-social behaviours (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Cart, 2010:33; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:47); behaviours that could also be associated with bullying.

### **2.2.2.2 Family relationships**

The family system is recognised as having a long-lasting effect and influence on the personality of children and adolescents (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Smith, 2011:8) and for this reason it is important to consider the nature of the relationships and the level of the attachment that children have to their parents as well as their siblings (Smith, 2011:32).

Attachment can be described as the responsiveness between the parent and the child and the bond that they share (Mal, Crano, Berger & Alvaro, 2013:1579). Attachment theory describes how the attachment style of the child with the parent, that is mainly formed during infancy, will model the way a child forms relationships in future. Therefore a child with an insecure attachment to his or her parents could have more difficulty in forming and maintaining healthy relationships later in life than a child with a secure attachment to the parents (Slee, 2010:63).

Children who are brought up in dysfunctional and uncaring families are less likely to develop positive, healthy relationships at school, while dismissive and authoritarian parenting can foster aggression in children (Orpinas & Horne, 2010:63; Rigby, 2010:7; Smith, 2011:33). Parents who display a lack of discipline and supervision or who are not involved in their children's' lives unwittingly cause these children to lead risky lifestyles, and foster aggressive and violent behaviours towards others (Rigby, 2010:8). Urbanski and Permuth (2009:47) state that bullying may be as a result of harsh discipline faced at home, while Smith (2011:33) states that fathers who were bullies at school are more likely to have sons who are also bullies at school.

Olweus and Limber (in Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:47) have reported on six familial factors consistently present in the bully's home environment:

- The home environment lacks any form of emotion.
- There is more likely to be an environment of chaos in the home.
- The family as a whole tends to be socially isolated.
- There is constant parental conflict.
- The discipline methods used in the home are ineffective or absent.
- The family tends to be rigid in their functioning.

Furthermore, children who are aggressive towards their siblings or had aggressive and uncaring siblings are known to display similar behaviours at school and may have problems in forming friendships with others (Martin, 2005:28; Thornberg, 2010:316).

### **2.2.2.3 Interpersonal relationships**

As children develop into adolescents, the peer group plays an increasingly important role in their lives (Berk, 2013:619; Mal et al., 2013:1579). The peer group has a definite effect on the bully, especially if the peer group has a positive attitude towards violence (Rigby, 2010:8). Many studies have shown that adolescents may behave aggressively themselves after seeing someone else model aggressive behaviour (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:47).

The norms of the peer group that a bully belongs to may also have an influence on the bullying behaviour that the bully displays. For example, the peer group may have certain group customs which encourage each group member to act the same way and not deviate from the norm. As a result, once an individual acts in a manner not in accordance with the group norms, they are typically victimised (Dixon, 2011:51; Smith, 2010:142).

In the same vein, peers can also encourage and validate the bully to continue the act of bullying (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012:2353). How a bully reacts to a situation is largely dependent on the pressures received from peers as these peers may have a significant and often negative influence on each other (Rigby, 2010:20).

### **2.2.2.4 School connectedness**

Considering the fact that school-aged children spend most of their day at school, it is understandable why school connectedness is such an important concept in the lives of these children (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012:2352; Orpinas & Horne, 2010:49). School connectedness can be defined as “the degree to which a student experiences a sense of caring and closeness to educators and in the overall school environment” (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141). This term also encompasses an adolescent’s feeling of belonging to the school and being accepted by others (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:134). School connectedness has the potential to increase or decrease the occurrence of bullying, as learners who experience positive relations with their

schools and their educators are less likely to be involved in bullying (Bayar & Uçanok, 2012:2353; Goff, 2011:177).

On the other hand, learners who feel isolated or who do not feel connected to their school may suffer academically and behaviourally and may find it difficult to relate to other learners, thereby opening themselves up to the risk of being bullied (Goff, 2011:177; Orpinas & Horne, 2010:49; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:109). Additionally, when there is a lack of care and respect for learners and they are met with fear and threats, they tend to respond with aggression (Orpinas & Horne, 2010:50).

A school without a bullying policy in place opens itself up to a culture of violence and bullying (Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Orpinas & Horne, 2010:51; Shaw & Cross, 2012:159) and schools should have measures in place to reduce bullying both inside and outside the school perimeters (Goff, 2011:181; Stauffer et al., 2012:355).

#### **2.2.2.5 Societal norms**

In today's society bullying is normalised by the belief that such behaviour is part of growing up, is a rite of passage or that it is harmless and simply a passing phase in childhood (Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, Bonanno, Vaillancourt & Henderson, 2010:101; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:5). In a recent study, it was discovered that one out of four educators did not believe that bullying could have long-lasting negative effects and that bullying "prepared students for life" (Stauffer et al., 2012:353). Bullying is a societal problem and affects millions of school-going children and adolescents, therefore it should not be normalised (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Chaux, Molano & Podlesky, 2009:520).

The manner in which the media portrays violence, bullying and abuse of power may affect children's views on bullying (Smith, 2011:32). Bullying is a common theme in popular movies featuring youthful characters, such as *Billy Madison*, *The Mighty*, *About a Boy*, *Bully*, *Ant Bully*, *Pay it Forward* and *Mean Girls*. Although these movies may tend to normalise bullying, they often promote courage and assertiveness for victims of bullying (Hymel et al., 2010:101).

### **2.2.2.6 Community characteristics**

There are certain community characteristics that seem to be related to the occurrence of bullying, such as the sense of belonging in the community, the socioeconomic conditions and levels of poverty, and levels of violence and safety within the neighbourhood (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Smith, 2011:8; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:113). Previous studies have proven that there is a higher occurrence of bullying in areas with lower socio-economic conditions and high levels of violence within the neighbourhood (Chaux et al., 2009:521).

Children who witness violence in their communities are more likely to be aggressive and hostile towards classmates (Chaux et al., 2009:521; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:181). These children often witness violence on a daily basis and learn that aggression and bullying are behaviours that can be used to fulfil their needs (Chaux et al., 2009:521). It was reported by Child (2014) that many learners in the Western Cape are surrounded by a “gangland” and fear for their lives on a daily basis when attending school. In August 2013, the Department of Education in the Western Cape was forced to close all schools in the area because violence had reached “crisis levels.” About 12000 children and 300 teachers were affected (Davids & Nombembe, 2014).

### **2.2.3 The role players in bullying**

There are different roles that can be identified in bullying, namely the bully, the victim, the bully-victim and the bystander.

#### **2.2.3.1 The bully**

The bully is someone who can be regarded as the perpetrator and can be described as someone who craves a feeling of power and control over others. The bully is impulsive and gains satisfaction from hurting and dominating others (Diamanduros et al., 2008:694; Fanti & Kimonis, 2013:397).

Urbanski and Permuth (2009:45) explain that there are different styles which a bully can adopt, namely proactive, reactive, extrovert, introvert or passive:

- **Proactive:** Proactive bullies desire feelings of control and power and tend to be non-emotional, controlled and deliberate in their actions.
- **Reactive:** Reactive bullies are emotional and impulsive, and tend to be paranoid and constantly feel threatened. This causes them to act with aggression, which they feel is justified.
- **Extrovert:** The extrovert bully is outgoing, rebellious and presents with an angry demeanour. These bullies are forceful in getting their way.
- **Introvert:** An introvert bully is very manipulative and controlling. This type of bully has a tendency to communicate with ease, but is usually misleading, dishonest and deceitful.
- **Passive:** A passive bully does not perform any acts of bullying. These bullies are insecure, dependent and unsure where they fit in which causes them to follow and support the bullies who do perform acts of bullying.

On the receiving end of the actions of the bully, is the victim of bullying.

### 2.2.3.2 The victim

The victim in a bullying situation is a person who is constantly faced with negative behaviours from the bully in the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults or psychological abuse (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:50). Although it is not always easy to determine the reasons why a person is being bullied, it appears that factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, disability, sexual orientation or even certain personal characteristics may allow the bullying to occur (Rigby, 2010:19). The victim is usually less powerful and may also be physically smaller than the bully. The victim may have low self-esteem, be insecure, socially isolated, and unpopular and may even present with depressive symptoms (Diamanduros et al., 2008:694).

Two kinds of victims of bullying are described by Urbanski and Permuth (2009:50), namely passive victims and proactive victims. Passive victims are cautious, shy, withdrawn, non-assertive, avoidant and tend to internalise problems. These victims

usually have difficulty connecting with their peers and may relate well to adults instead (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:51). Proactive victims usually have difficulty in social situations and display a combination of anxiety and aggression. In reaction to being bullied, they can be argumentative and attempt to stand up for themselves, but this behaviour is usually unsuccessful (Rigby, 2010:19; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:51).

### 2.2.3.3 The bully-victim

The bully-victim can be understood as those victims who become bullies after being bullied by others (Diamanduros et al., 2008:694; Fanti & Kimonis, 2013:396; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:51). This group is seen to be the most problematic in terms of mental health and psychological problems (Lindfors, Kaltiala-Heino & Rimpelä, 2012:2). The bully-victim tends to present with low academic performance and behavioural problems, and is also socially isolated, having few friends and poor relationships with classmates (Diamanduros et al., 2008:694). There is often a reason behind aggression and if this is not addressed, the bully-victim may continue to present with anti-social behaviour and a difficulty functioning in society (Adams, 2010:47; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:51). Another role player in bullying is the bystander.

### 2.2.3.4 The bystander

A bystander can either be an active part of the problem by encouraging the bully or can be a passive part of the problem by witnessing the bullying and not intervening (Agosto et al., 2012:40; Burnham et al., 2011:20; Diamanduros et al., 2008:698; Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Stauffer et al., 2012:358). Urbanski & Permuth (2009:56) describe the various ways a bystander may react to a bullying situation:

- **Follow:** By following, the bystander will stand back and wait for an opportunity to become involved in the bullying; however, he or she will never initiate the bullying. This person may start out as a bystander but may eventually become a bully.

- **Reinforce:** If a bystander reinforces, he or she offers indirect support to the bully in the form of comments, gestures or body language.
- **Observe:** The observer is aware of the bullying situation and is a witness to it, but does not want to get involved due to the fear of victimisation.
- **Oppose:** This reaction involves a dislike of the bullying behaviour and a desire to help. This person however refrains from offering help due to fear of their own victimisation and lack of support from others.
- **Defend:** The defender will stand up against the bully and attempt to stop the behaviour.

The reaction of the bystander can therefore have an influence on the bullying situation. Bystanders thus need to be encouraged to stand up to the bullying situation, support the victims and report the incident to a figure of authority (Martin, 2005:29; Thornberg, 2010:311).

#### **2.2.4 Categories of traditional bullying**

There are various categories of traditional bullying. Physical and verbal bullying are overt or open forms of bullying, while indirect and relational bullying is covert or a more “undercover” form of bullying (Dempsey et al., 2009:962; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). Bullying has evolved over the years and a rise in technology has allowed a new form of bullying to emerge called cyberbullying (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Lindfors et al., 2012:2). After discussing these categories, cyberbullying will be discussed in detail in the section thereafter.

##### **2.2.4.1 Physical bullying**

Physical bullying involves physical acts of violence such as hitting, kicking, punching, and spitting as well as taking or damaging another’s belongings, including their homework or food (Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:64; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:34). Chibbaro (2007:65) argues that physical bullying can also include more serious forms of violence such as stabbing, shooting or strangling, however, Rigby (2010:14) counters that these forms are found in a low

percentage of cases. Physical bullying can also include any act which causes embarrassment to the victim, such as pulling their pants down or tripping the victim (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:34).

#### **2.2.4.2 Verbal bullying**

Verbal bullying may include actions such as teasing, taunting, threatening, ridicule, sarcasm and scapegoating (Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:65; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). It is often difficult to assess whether a verbal statement can be regarded as verbal bullying as this depends on how the statement affects the victim; where one person may be unaffected by the verbal comment, another may be genuinely upset by it (Rigby, 2010:17). It can be a particularly devastating experience when the verbal bullying is based on race or appearance (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:35).

#### **2.2.4.3 Indirect and relational bullying**

Behaviours such as excluding, ignoring or “giving someone the cold shoulder,” gossiping, spreading rumours and blackmailing are all actions which could be seen as indirect and relational bullying (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Chibbaro, 2007:65; Rigby, 2010:6). According to Urbanski and Permuth (2009:43) relational bullying can also include damaging another person’s self-esteem as well as their chances to be accepted by a peer group. Electronic media is rapidly being recognised as one of the easiest ways to spread rumours, exclude people and bully others (Schultze-Krumbholz & Scheithauer, 2009:224) and relates to the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

### **2.3 THE PHENOMENON OF CYBERBULLYING**

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of electronic media and information and communication technologies, such as e-mail, mobile phones, instant messaging and the Internet, to intentionally harm a specific target by causing damage to his or her social status, relationships and reputation (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:33). This type of bullying can include

teasing, name calling, hurtful stories, embarrassing pictures or videos, lies, false rumours, threats of violence or death, and other harmful actions (Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:1). Cyberbullying is the fastest growing form of bullying happening around the world. This could be related to the increase in the use of technology in interpersonal communications (Cart, 2010:34).

This section will provide a broad overview of positive and negative uses of technology, the various types of electronic media that are used in cyberbullying as well as the different types of cyberbullying one may experience.

### **2.3.1 The use of technology in communications**

In South Africa, due to a greater access to technology, one out of five people has a “smart phone”, a phone that can access the Internet and social networking sites (Van Rooyen, 2012:7) and over two million people in South Africa use the Internet to access social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Ferreira, 2012:10). In the USA it is estimated that a total of 87 per cent of adolescents use the Internet daily (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:7). The use of technology can be either positive or negative.

A number of positive uses of technology have been noted. Trolley and Hanel (2010:21) state the following: “The ability to communicate instantaneously with one another, search for information, play games, make travel arrangements, and search for jobs are just a few of the wonderful uses of technology.” There are also websites purely for entertainment, and for educational benefits, where course material can be added online for easy access and additional research for projects can be done (Diamanduros et al., 2008:693; Goff, 2011:180; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:1; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801; Thomas & McGee, 2012:22). The Internet has connected friends and family from all over the world for many years now and access to those who are far away helps people to feel part of another person’s life (Agosto et al., 2012:40; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:67; Burnham et al., 2011:3; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:504; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801).

Furthermore, communication via technology is believed to enhance a number of cognitive and interpersonal skills. However, as stated by Hinduja and Patchin (2012:8), for this to happen, a positive online environment is required:

Cyberspace provides a venue to learn and refine the ability to exercise self-control, to relate with tolerance and respect to others' viewpoints, to express sentiments in a healthy and normative manner, and to engage in critical thinking and decision-making. These skills, however, cannot be effectively internalised if the online learning environment is unwelcoming or altogether hostile to the user.

Despite its advantages, access to communication technology also has disadvantages depending on the intentions of the user. In this case technology can be used for cybercrimes (phishing schemes and fraud) and people could become addicted to the Internet and social networking sites, creating the illusion that they cannot be without their smart phones. What is most worrying is that communication technology has enabled bullying to extend into the online world, from which there is no escape (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801; Steffgen, König, Pfetsch & Melzer, 2011:643; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:33).

Advances in technology and the different types of electronic media can contribute to unacceptable and undesirable communication behaviour among children through the use of technologies (Badenhorst, 2011:1). Either the positive use or misuse of the electronic media can occur in the different forms of electronic media that are accessible to the wider public as well as adolescents.

### **2.3.2 Forms of electronic media and their uses and misuses**

There are a wide variety of electronic media sources available that are currently at the disposal of school-going children (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:4). In this section the electronic devices or media sources will be discussed as well as their general uses and potential misuses.

### **2.3.2.1 Mobile phones**

Mobile phones are used to talk to others, send text messages and images, take photos and record videos, access the Internet and e-mail others (Snakenborg et al., 2011:91). The ability to take photos and videos on a mobile phone enables users to take compromising or inappropriate photos. These photos can then be sent to others by the bully with the intention of exposing or embarrassing the victim appearing in the photos (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Rivers & Noret, 2010:644; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5).

Rude, threatening and nasty text messages are also sent from mobile phones (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Ives, 2012:47; Naruskov et al., 2012:332; Rivers & Noret, 2010:654). A bully can also make abusive or “silent calls” to the victim (Smith & Slonje, 2010:249). A silent call is when the victim answers a call, but the bully remains silent. Although mobile phones may make it easier to engage in inappropriate behaviours, these devices are not the cause of such behaviours (Thomas & McGee, 2012:19).

### **2.3.2.2 E-mail**

E-mails are electronic messages that are sent to a person using a unique e-mail address. Multiple recipients can receive the same message at one time (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Smith & Slonje, 2010:250; Snakenborg et al., 2011:91). The content of the message can be hurtful or threatening and attachments such as photos or videos can be included. Once received, private e-mails can be forwarded to additional people, whom the message was not meant to be seen by, thereby invading a person’s privacy (Snakenborg et al., 2011:91; Willard, 2006:55).

### **2.3.2.3 Instant messaging**

Instant messaging (IM) is similar to text messaging, with the difference between the two, that the person one is communicating with can respond immediately in a form of “live chatting” (Snakenborg et al., 2011:91). There are various IM programmes such

as Yahoo Messenger, Microsoft.Net messenger, and Skype (Smith & Slonje, 2010:250; Titley, 2006:1180). Users of these programmes can easily take advantage of the technology and use it to send malicious, threatening and inappropriate messages to each other (McElligott, 2006:20).

#### **2.3.2.4 Video-hosting sites**

Video-hosting sites such as YouTube allow users to post and view videos of interest (Snakenborg et al., 2011:91). Inappropriate, nasty and embarrassing videos can be posted, viewed and commented on by millions of people across the world because the site is free and easy to access (Roher, 2007:20). The cyberbully may also secretly film the victim doing something embarrassing or degrading and then post the video online (Li, 2006:159).

#### **2.3.2.5 Chat rooms**

A chat room is a website that allows people to meet and “chat” with other people about common interests in real-time. Many of South Africa’s adolescents have a smart phone which has chat programmes such as BBM, MXit and WhatsApp installed on the phone (Jacobs, Barnard, Brenkman, Gibson, Labuschagne, Macmillan, Miller, Noomé, Stoffberg & Wassermann, 2012:106; Louw & Louw, 2007:264; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5). MXit is one of the most popular chat rooms in South Africa (Chigona & Chigona, 2008:42).

Chat rooms can be positive as they are a cost-effective way for adolescents to remain in contact with one another. However, there are also negative aspects related to chat rooms in that they can create opportunities for anonymous cyberstalking and cyberbullying, making the bully difficult to identify (Jacobs et al., 2012:107).

### **2.3.2.6 Social networking sites**

Social networking sites are a part of everyday life (Carlowe, 2008:20). These sites include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace and they are used for developing friendships, keeping in touch, sharing information with others and posting news, photos and videos (Snakenborg et al., 2011:91; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5). Abusive, embarrassing and hurtful messages, photos and videos can be posted to users and can be viewed by millions of people (Shaw & Cross, 2012:142; Stauffer et al., 2012:353).

The use of social networking sites is constantly growing and changing to suit the needs of millions of users (Balog, Pribeanu, Lamanaskas & Šlekienė, 2013:378). Unfortunately, the use of these sites is also associated with negative aspects such as depression, psychological problems and cyberbullying. Additionally, social networking sites distract people from reality, weaken real relationships between people, foster estrangement, encourage suicide and spread personal information to an unknown number of people (Balog et al., 2013:385). Social networking sites are the most popular form of social media used by adolescents (Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:5).

### **2.3.2.7 Websites**

Although the creation of a personal website is to provide information about a person, group or institution, one can create an entire website that is defamatory, abusive and offensive towards a specific person. The aim of such a website is to expose the victim and encourage others to view the website and comment on the content, thereby adding to the victimisation of the targeted person (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Smith & Slonje, 2010:250; Twyman et al., 2010:195).

There are reports of websites that have been specifically created to encourage people to commit suicide (Carlowe, 2008:20; Slovak & Singer, 2011:12; Wong, Fu, Yau, Ma, Law, Chang & Yip, 2013:3). These websites provide detailed instructions on how to commit suicide and include chat rooms in which participants provide

encouragement and “tips” (Carlowe, 2008:20). Victims of cyberbullying are encouraged to join these websites (Slovak & Singer, 2011:12). There are efforts underway to have these websites shut down, but they are not considered illegal. The exact number of pro-suicide websites on the Internet is unknown and it is close to impossible to remove such websites from the Internet (Carlowe, 2008:21; Wong et al., 2013:11).

All of the above-mentioned forms of electronic media can be used positively, however also maliciously as platforms for cyberbullying. There are different ways in which a bully can use the various forms of electronic media to cyberbully others.

### **2.3.3 Types of cyberbullying**

The various types of cyberbullying which exist will be discussed in this section. The types of cyberbullying include flaming, harassment, denigration, cyberstalking, impersonation, outing or trickery, exclusion, happy slapping, Internet polling, text wars and warning wars.

#### **2.3.3.1 Flaming**

Flaming involves sending angry, nasty, vulgar or mischievous messages with the intention to antagonise and “inflammate” the emotions and sensibility of the victim (Agosto et al., 2012:38; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:101; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69; Willard, 2006:56; Wright et al., 2009:35). These attacks attempt to hurt the victim emotionally, psychologically and socially and to demonstrate the power that the bully possesses (Chibbaro, 2007:66; Davis & Nixon, 2012:102).

#### **2.3.3.2 Harassment**

Harassment includes repeatedly sending abusive or threatening messages to the victim (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69; Willard, 2006:56; Wright et al., 2009:35). These messages can be sent via e-mail, text messages and social networking sites (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139). It

is also common for cyberbullies to log into different chat rooms and harass one specific person who may not be known to the bully (Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2012:60; Chibbaro, 2007:66). Harassment is characterised by the repeated sending of the messages.

### **2.3.3.3 Denigration**

Denigration occurs when a cyberbully posts embarrassing pictures, spreads rumours or divulges personal information on a website (usually a social networking site) about the victim (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:39; Willard, 2006:56). This can also take place via e-mail or other messaging services and the content concerning the victim may not be true (Wright et al., 2009:35). Another common trend exhibited by cyberbullies is to gain access to the victim's social networking sites and make it appear as if the victim is the one transmitting the information (Agatston et al., 2012:60). The most common denigration attacks are those launched by students against school employees or management due to perceived unfair treatment (Chibbaro, 2007:66). The main aim of this type of bullying is to embarrass the victim.

### **2.3.3.4 Cyberstalking**

Cyberstalking involves the repeated transmission of unwanted text messages, instant messages or e-mails which are filled with intimidation, threats and/or harassment (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Gardner, 2010:273; Willard, 2006:56; Wright et al., 2009:35). Cyberstalking can also include posting messages and images intended to embarrass, shock or anger the victim and can be viewed by an unlimited number of people (Agatston et al., 2012:60). The act of cyberstalking can lead to the victim feeling concerned for his or her safety (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69; Willard, 2006:56), mostly due to the intimidating or threatening content of the information.

### **2.3.3.5 Impersonation**

Impersonation occurs when the aggressor or bully attempts to manipulate the victim's social relationships by sending messages to individuals from the victim's phone, e-mail or instant messaging account (Dempsey et al., 2009:963). Comments made by the cyberbully are contradictory to the character of the victim and the latter's relationships with others are ruined with the victim being unaware of the cause (Agatston et al., 2012:60; Willard, 2006:56; Wright et al., 2009:35). The fact that the cyberbully adopts the persona of the victim makes impersonation particularly devastating as a type of cyberbullying (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69).

### **2.3.3.6 "Outing" or trickery**

"Outing" or trickery involves divulging personal, sensitive or embarrassing, and confidential information via electronic media (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Willard, 2006:56). This information is not only gained via electronic media; the cyberbully can also coax the information verbally from their victim and distribute the information electronically (Agatston et al., 2012:60; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). This type of bullying thus focuses specifically on information that the victim would want to keep confidential.

### **2.3.3.7 Exclusion**

Exclusion as a form of cyberbullying involves the purposeful, intentional exclusion of a person from an online social activity or private chat room in order to make the victim feel hurt, jealous or embarrassed (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69; Wright et al., 2009:35). Many people experience this exclusion upon finding out that a friend or group of friends has "unfriended" them from social networking sites (Bauman & Newman, 2013:38; Willard, 2006:56).

### **2.3.3.8 “Happy slapping”**

“Happy slapping” is a relatively new form of cyberbullying. It occurs when there is a face-to-face physical attack on a victim, which is typically captured on video (usually on a mobile phone) and then distributed via electronic media (Smith, et al., 2008:376; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). There have been numerous media reports of physical attacks (“going live” and) being viewed on YouTube depicting scenes of school violence and victimisation of a school educator or learner (The Times, 2013). The escalation of violence broadcast on the Internet is evident in a video which featured the brutal killing of a learner by fellow learners; a video which was eventually removed from YouTube because the child died (The Times, 2013).

### **2.3.3.9 Internet polling**

Internet polling involves the creation of a blog or website by a person who then invites others to rate another person or vote on an offensive or embarrassing question regarding the person (Bauman & Newman, 2013:29; Li, 2006:159; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2; Strom & Strom, 2012:38; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). Questions can include: “Who is the ugliest / fattest person in the class / grade?” and “Who do you hate and why?” (Li, 2006:159; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). Internet polling could expose the victim to embarrassing comments from others.

### **2.3.3.10 Text wars**

Text wars occur when a group of people collectively send hundreds of nasty text messages to the victim. One intention of initiating a text war is to get the victim to reply to these messages, sometimes sending thousands of text messages per month resulting in arguments at home over expensive mobile phone bills which the parents of the victim are responsible for paying (Thomas & McGee, 2012:19; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). The involvement of a large group of people and numerous messages can make this type of cyberbullying an overwhelming experience for the victim.

### 2.3.3.11 Sexting

Sexting is a term created by using a combination of the terms “sex” and “texting”. Many adolescents engage in sexting; a form of risky behaviour during which messages and/or photos of a sexual nature are distributed via electronic media, usually mobile phones (Bauman & Newman, 2013:35; Thomas & McGee, 2012:19; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5). Badenhorst (2011:3) describes three main scenarios in which sexting may occur:

- Exchanges of images solely between two romantic partners.
- Exchanges between romantic partners which are then shared with others outside the relationship.
- Exchanges where at least one person would like to start a romantic relationship.

Sexting content can be stored and later used as ammunition by the cyberbully. The victim believes their messages will not be seen by anyone, however when a relationship ends or becomes unstable, those private messages and photos can be made public as a way of bullying the victim (Bauman & Newman, 2013:35; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5). The adolescents who are victims of this type of bullying experience emotional distress, alienation and a loss of privacy when their personal and private messages and images are seen by those for whom they were not intended (Ives, 2012:46). The dangers of these images are described by Badenhorst (2011:4):

The problem with sending these types of photos or messages is that the sender loses control over what happens to the photos or messages once the ‘send’ button has been pressed. Chances are that these photos or messages will end up online, and will exist forever in cyber space. Once the photo or message is in cyber space, the sender is not able to retrieve or delete it. Another concern is that compromising photos or videos of a child may fall into the hands of a paedophile and may be used for illegal purposes, such as images to groom other children.

As indicated above, sexting could have long-term and far reaching consequences, not only for the intended victim, but also for other vulnerable persons in society.

### **2.3.3.12 Warning wars**

Social networking sites and other websites have security features whereby inappropriate content can be reported resulting in the reported user being blocked from using that site. However, in the instance of warning wars, the cyberbully falsely reports a victim thereby blocking the victim from the website in an attempt to demonstrate their power over the victim (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69).

From the discussion of the different types of cyberbullying, it becomes evident that cyberbullying presents with certain characteristics that differentiates it from traditional face-to-face bullying.

## **2.4 TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING**

There are certain characteristics that differentiate cyberbullying from traditional bullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013:28; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Twyman et al., 2010:195). Due to these characteristics, cyberbullying has the potential to be just as (or even more) malicious and damaging than traditional forms of bullying (Goff, 2011:177; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:52; Willard, 2006:55). The characteristics of cyberbullying include anonymity, physical distance, as well as the fact that there is no escape, technology use is unsupervised and cyberbullying can be seen as a hidden phenomenon (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:62; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141). The specific characteristics of cyberbullying are discussed in this section.

### **2.4.1 Anonymity**

Using a mobile phone or any other electronic device provides the cyberbully with the ability to remain anonymous because usernames, nicknames and false e-mail addresses (also known as “handles” or “avatars”) can be used as opposed to real names (Cart, 2010:34; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148). The anonymity afforded by cyberbullying results in a loss of personal and social norms, rules and morals, and even laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615).

However, the cyberbully may only remain anonymous for a limited period of time as the victims usually do find out who the cyberbully is from a witness or someone else who was involved in the instance of bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:62). At that stage, much harm might have already been caused for the victim.

#### **2.4.2 Physical distance**

Characteristic of online communication, there is a physical distance separating the cyberbully and the victim. This distance gives the cyberbully a perceived emotional distance and the courage to say things online that would be more difficult to say face-to-face (Adams, 2010:45; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Ortega, Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Calmaestra & Vega, 2009:202; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141).

The physical and emotional distance enables cyberbullies to remain unaffected by the harm they are causing because they cannot physically see the emotional turmoil that the victim experiences (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Naruskov et al., 2012:325; Thornberg, Rosenqvist & Johansson, 2012:339). The cyberbully may believe that he or she is being humorous and is providing entertainment for others (Steffgen et al., 2011:643; Twyman et al., 2010:195).

Cyberbullies may also develop a positive attitude towards cyberbullying, believing that it is acceptable to send harsh and cruel messages to people when they “deserve it” (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:125). As a form of distancing themselves from thoughts of suffering, cyberbullies may go as far as blaming the victim and believing that they deserve to be bullied (Thornberg, 2010:320; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:188).

#### **2.4.3 No escape from cyberbullying**

With regard to traditional bullying, victims can escape to the safety of their homes after school and over weekends (Beale & Hall, 2007:10; Dempsey et al., 2009:963). Conversely, for the victim of cyberbullying, there is no escape because there are very few areas where technology does not extend into everyday living and most adolescents are not willing to relinquish the use of their mobile phone or the Internet

(Juvonen & Gross, 2008:497; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Thomas & McGee, 2012:19; Willard, 2006:55).

In order to escape the constant abuse which seems to follow them in every aspect of their lives, victims of cyberbullying may take drastic measures and may even turn to suicide (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Miller & Hufstедler, 2009:2; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:150; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5; Stauffer et al., 2012:353). These measures provide evidence of the potential pervasiveness of cyberbullying in the lives of the victims.

#### **2.4.4 Potential audience**

In terms of cyberbullying, the potential audience is larger than that of traditional bullying due to the vast number of users of electronic media which includes the use of Internet, social networking sites and instant messaging programmes. Information can be distributed widely and quickly and, as a result, the humiliation felt by the victim tends to become amplified (Bauman & Newman, 2013:28; Kowalski & Limber, 2008:823; Lindfors et al., 2012:1; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Twyman et al., 2010:195).

Once a status, comment, broadcast message, picture or video has been sent to the Internet, social networking site or instant messaging programme, it can be viewed, shared and redistributed by millions of people. Once submitted, it is impossible to erase information or images from the memories of those who have seen it (Adams, 2010:45; Naruskov et al., 2012:326). The extent of the exposure experienced by the victim, both in terms of number of viewers and availability of content, is thus almost limitless.

#### **2.4.5 Unsupervised use of technology**

Adolescents tend to have unlimited access to technology, mobile phones and the Internet and tend to use these forms of communication regularly (Stauffer et al., 2012:354). Typically, adolescents' use of these channels is unsupervised (Baer et al., 2012:733; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:68; Hinduja & Patchin 2010:615; Juvonen &

Gross, 2008:497; Twyman et al., 2010:199). The technology and the type of misbehaviour (unique to cyberbullying) are unfamiliar to adults, which has made it difficult for parents to prevent and deal with the phenomenon (Badenhorst, 2011:2). Additional reasons to explain the lack of supervision over adolescents' use of technology are suggested by O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011:801):

- Parents have a lack of technical abilities in understanding how the various technologies, websites and social networking sites work.
- Parents have limited time in their busy days and may have difficulty in following up on a regular basis on their children's online activities on a regular basis.
- Technology is ever-changing and progressing. There are always new websites or social networking sites to join. Mobile phone and computer companies also regularly release new models of their products that have increasingly sophisticated technologies and capabilities.

It is suggested that parents need to understand that "giving a child a phone exposes him to influences over which you have no control" (Ndlovu, 2014:5). In addition, parents need to understand that their children's online life is an extension of their offline life and that the two are rarely separate (Agosto et al., 2012:38; Collier, 2009:36). Adolescents seem to prefer not having their parent as "a friend" on their social networking account and, according to a recent study only 18% of parents had their child as a "friend" on Facebook (Strom & Strom, 2012:49; Twyman et al., 2010:197).

There needs to be adequate supervision and monitoring of adolescents' use of technology. However, it can be difficult to monitor something that adolescents feel is private and personal, and many do not want to involve their parents in this part of their lives (Slonje & Smith, 2008:153; Stauffer et al., 2012:366). The unsupervised use of technology can be one of the reasons why cyberbullying is regarded as a hidden phenomenon.

#### **2.4.6 Cyberbullying as a hidden phenomenon**

Cyberbullying can be seen as a hidden phenomenon as adolescents have freedom in their use of technology and parents may lack the skills needed to monitor their use (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:497; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801; Twyman et al., 2010:199). The lack of supervision enables adolescents to engage more freely in risky online behaviours, including cyberbullying (Agosto et al., 2012:39). Parents are often unaware of the torture that their children may be enduring due to cyberbullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008:152). However, although parents may be unaware of the extent of their child’s suffering, this does not mean that they are not concerned.

Parents need guidance in handling the matter of cyberbullying should their children be able to confide in their parents regarding their experience (Agosto et al., 2012:38; Diamanduros et al., 2008:698; Goff, 2011:181; Rigby, 2010:122; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:150; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:82). Unfortunately, it has been proven that many adolescents are reluctant to share their victimisation or perpetration with their parents or a person of authority (Stauffer et al., 2012:366).

Since victims are not always willing to report their victimisation to their parents or another person of authority they tend to battle with the torment alone (Burnham, et al., 2011:5; Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Slonje & Smith, 2008:153; Stauffer et al., 2012:366; Willard, 2006:55). However, when victims are willing to open up, they may choose to confide in a friend about their suffering (Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:146; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147). However, many adolescents who are witnesses to the cyberbullying of their friends find themselves powerless and afraid to report the bullying to an adult or to become involved to assist their friends. These adolescents are known as “cyberstanders” (Lindfors et al., 2012:2).

## **2.5 THE IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING**

Although cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying, the psychological, social and physical effects of both are similar. However, there is evidence that points to cyberbullying as being particularly damaging to a victim due to the influence of technology and the victim's inability to escape from the cyberbullying (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Burnham et al., 2011:4; Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Steffgen et al., 2011:643). Although there is not always the component of physical attack in cyberbullying, there are numerous psychological consequences (Twyman et al., 2010:196).

The widespread consequences of bullying are indicated by Shaw and Cross (2012:142), who pose that "bullying between students at school can seriously affect the social, physical and psychological well-being – as well as the academic achievement – of both perpetrators and those who are victimised." These effects can be long-term, will continue to affect the perpetrator and the victim for years after the bullying has stopped, and can prevent children from becoming fully-functioning and healthy members of society (Lodge & Feldman, 2007:633; Rigby, 2010:4; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:31).

Bullying and cyberbullying have similar negative effects on the bully and the victim (Burnham et al., 2011:4; Twyman et al., 2010:196). Consequences include an impact on psychological functioning, academic performance, relationships as well as a physical impact.

### **2.5.1 The psychological impact of bullying and cyberbullying**

Bullying can have extremely negative psychological effects on the victim and the bully (Badenhorst, 2011:3; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616). For the victim, psychological effects may include emotional distress, anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, fear, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence, and loneliness (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Diamanduros et al., 2008:694; Rigby, 2010:16; Shaw & Cross,

2012:142; Slovak & Singer, 2011:5; Stauffer et al., 2012:354; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:54; Willard, 2006:55).

For bullies, the act of bullying threatens their emotional and social development and increases chances of engaging in substance abuse and the chance of developing an anti-social personality disorder (Badenhorst, 2011:4; Smith, 2010:143; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:49). The bully may develop either a higher or lower sense of self-esteem (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:49). As with the victim, bullying could thus have life-long consequences for the bully.

### **2.5.2 The impact on academic performance**

The victim and the bully may both experience difficulties regarding their academic performance as a result of acts of bullying. The bully may act aggressively due to the frustration caused by his or her academic struggles, thereby creating a dangerous cycle (Thornberg, 2010:311). Furthermore, he or she may also have a negative attitude towards the rules and systems in place at school, and as a result may even drop out of school (Chaux et al., 2009:520; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012:91; Snakenborg et al., 2011:94; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:48). The victim may find it difficult to focus in class due to the psychological effects of the exposure to bullying and may experience a deterioration of academic performance (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Stauffer et al., 2012:354; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:55). The effects of bullying can thus extend into the school environment. It could also affect the interpersonal relationships of the bully and the victim.

### **2.5.3 The impact on relationships**

Victims of bullying typically withdraw from their family members and friends (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010:90; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:55). The victim may also act out with aggression towards family members and friends in an attempt to handle the frustration and emotions that they experience as a result of being bullied (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Price & Dalgleish, 2010:55; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:55).

The bully begins to develop a strong need to dominate others and learns that the only way to be assertive is by means of using threats and intimidation (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010:92). The bully tends to have a large friendship circle and may transfer their hostile behaviour onto their relationships with these friends as well as their families (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Smith, 2011:33; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:48; Vieno et al., 2011:395). Although the bully, in contrast with the victim, maintains a circle of friends, his or her interactions in the friendship circle may be characterised by control and hostility.

#### **2.5.4 The physical impact of bullying and cyberbullying**

Frequent illness, constant headaches and stomach-aches are common among victims of bullying (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:52). Victims may also experience a lack of appetite and girls in particular tend to develop self-harm strategies in an attempt to cope with the bullying. Their efforts to cope may lead to eating disorders and self-harming behaviours such as cutting, hitting and burning themselves (Cart, 2010:33; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve & Coulter, 2012:173; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:52).

In extreme cases, especially in cyberbullying, the victim may feel that there is no escape from the bully and turn to self-harm and even suicide (Adams, 2010:44; Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Burnham et al., 2011:7; Cart, 2010:34; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2; Rigby, 2010:16; Smith, 2011:32; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:54). School shootings are an example of an extreme consequence in cases where bullying was involved (Cart, 2010:33; Diamanduros et al., 2008:693; Naruskov et al., 2012:332). A Gauteng newspaper reported on a learner who had shot the person who had been allegedly bullying him for years. "He had been severely bullied and it was not a once-off thing. He had complained to the school but they did nothing and he took the law into his hands" (The Times, 2014).

The impact of bullying and cyberbullying can be extensive and long-lasting and points to a need for intervention. Children who constantly bully others at school typically use the same tactics to fulfil their needs outside of school. Without

intervention, bullies are more likely to become a major threat to the community, develop a criminal record or even spend time in prison (Chaux et al., 2009:520; Rigby, 2010:16; Slee, 2010:483; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012:87; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:49). South Africa does have legislation to protect learners from bullying at schools, but seemingly only to a certain extent.

### **2.5.5 Cyberbullying and South African law**

Cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon and it is not specifically regulated in South African law (Moodley, 2012:540). However, attempts to criminalise cyberbullying have been problematic because doing so may impact on the freedom of expression of individuals through text or images and the right to privacy of online users. The role of the media in neglecting to highlight the seriousness of cyberbullying has also been criticised by some academic writers (Badenhorst, 2011:3; Cassim, 2013:3).

There are some laws set in place to protect victims of bullying and cyberbullying. In the Protection from Harassment Act, Act 17 of 2011, harassment is defined to include those bullied at schools and electronically (Section 1). Additionally, a person who is being cyberbullied may apply to the court for a protection order (Section 2), and once an interim protection order has been issued the court will investigate. Should the perpetrator's identity be unknown, the court may request the respective electronic communications service provider to furnish their particulars to the court (Section 4).

The District Memo (377 of 2013) from the Gauteng Department of Education dictates that all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, must be reported to the school principal immediately. The principal is required to report all incidents to the District Director (Gauteng Department of Education, 2013:2). The Film and Publication Board is currently campaigning for cyber safety to be included in the school curriculum after a recent study showed that up to 82% of learners at school have access to the Internet (Ndlovu, 2014:5).

According to the Sexual Offences Act 32 of 2007, child pornography is defined as “any image, however created, or any description or presentation of a person, real or simulated, who is, or who is depicted or described or presented as being, under the age of 18 years, of an explicit or sexual nature” (Section 1). Adolescents often exchange gossip and images via electronic media that sexually expose themselves and others, sometimes for entertainment purposes and occasionally with the intention of vengeance (Hanson, 2011:674). Academic definitions of sexting emphasise that sexually explicit texts or nude or partially nude images of a person under the age of 18 that are sent to another person may in some instances be classified as child pornography (Badenhorst, 2011:2; Slane, 2013:119). Sending or sharing such content may therefore constitute a contravention of legislation prohibiting the possession, distribution, creation or production of child pornography. This may result in children being prosecuted on serious charges, with serious consequences, for something they do not necessarily regard as wrong or illegal (Badenhorst, 2011:4).

The Internet, and to some extent mobile phones, create a ‘virtual’ world in which bullying and technology have become new cultures of their own (Bauman & Newman, 2013:123; Brown, 2011:30; Collier, 2009:38; Moodley, 2012:558; Shaw & Cross, 2012:156). This virtual world creates a sense of anonymity and distance. This can result in feelings of disconnectedness, which contribute to the occurrence of cyber bullying and sexting among adults and children (Badenhorst, 2011:2).

Although very few adolescents are unaffected by technology, there is clear proof that there are particular demographic differences related to cyberbullying (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:19).

## **2.6 DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS RELATED TO CYBERBULLYING**

Demographic factors which have an influence on cyberbullying typically include gender, culture, ethnicity, location and age.

### **2.6.1 The role of gender**

Although both males and females are involved in bullying behaviours, each gender employs different bullying methods and experiences victimisation differently (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:117). In the case of cyberbullying, females are more likely to report being victims of cyberbullying than males (Hoff & Mitchell, 2010:53; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:17) while in the case of traditional bullying, males are more likely to report to an adult than females (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:117). According to studies there is no significant difference in the ratio of males and females related to the role of being a cyberbully or a victim. This may be due to the fact that cyberbullying affords a sense of anonymity and physical distance, thereby removing what would otherwise serve as inhibiting factors (Ang & Goh, 2010:389; Feinberg & Robey, 2009:27; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:17; Welrave & Heirman, 2011:60).

However, there appears to be differences in the way in which females and males react to being victims of cyberbullying. Females tend to lose self-confidence when bullied and tend to withdraw from school peers and family relationships. Females are also more likely to fall into depression or consider suicide, while males are more likely to fight back (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Hoff & Mitchell, 2010:60; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:118). Males tend to physically retaliate more often than females, and for this reason, males also make up the largest portion of the bully-victim group (Solberg, Olweus & Endresen, 2007:452).

### **2.6.2 The role of culture and ethnicity**

Children and adolescents from all over the world experience bullying (Fanti & Kimonis, 2013:397; Roberts & Ali, 2013:10; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:15). To date, it has not yet been determined to what extent culture and ethnicity influence bullying and victimisation (Walrave & Heirman, 2011:60). However, culture and ethnicity may lead victims and perpetrators to interpret and experience bullying differently and for these reasons, further bullying and cyberbullying studies from various cultural

perspectives need to be undertaken (Naruskov et al., 2012:340; Thornberg 2010:312).

### **2.6.3 The role of location**

A large portion of bullying takes place at school (Fanti & Kimonis, 2013:399; Martin, 2005:28; Rigby, 2010:4; Roberts & Ali, 2013:6; Smith & Slonje, 2010:256; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:177). However, cyberbullying is quickly catching up to even out this trend since there is no escape from the cyberbully and victimisation continues at home (Adams, 2010:45; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:64; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:9; Smith & Slonje, 2010:256; Twyman et al., 2010:195). The fact that cyberbullying takes place by means of electronic media, results in it not being limited to any geographical location such as the school.

### **2.6.4 The role of age**

Bullying tends to become more prevalent as children grow older. Older children and adolescents tend to engage in cyberbullying more regularly than younger children (Naruskov et al., 2012:323; Rigby, 2010:16; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:139; Smith & Slonje, 2010:256; Twyman et al., 2010:195). This is understandable when one considers that adolescents spend a significant portion of their time engaging with technological devices (Baer et al., 2012:729; Louw & Louw, 2007:264; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Slovak & Singer, 2011:6).

Adolescents use electronic media and social networking sites to continue the face-to-face activities in their lives such as socialising, discussing topics of interest, forming and maintaining friendships and romantic relationships, and even for research for school (Agosto et al., 2012:38; Collier, 2009:38; Dempsey et al., 2009:962; Jacobsen & Forste, 2011:279; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:503; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:2). Adolescents are most likely to have a “limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure and are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with social media” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:800). As a result, adolescents may be at greater risk of exposure to cyberbullying.

## 2.7 ADOLESCENCE AS A LIFE STAGE

In South Africa there are roughly 10.5 million people between the ages of 10 and 19 making up more than 20% of the population (Wild & Swartz, 2012:204). Adolescents constitute the largest age group in South Africa as well as the rest of the world (Richter, in Wild & Swartz, 2012:204).

Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by many physical, cognitive and social changes (Ahmadi, Anoosheh, Vaismoradi & Safdari, 2009:257; Kingery, Erdley & Marshall, 2011:216; Saví Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2406). Adolescence occurs between the ages of 11 and 21 and usually starts at the onset of puberty and ends when the adolescent takes on adult roles such as employment or marriage (Louw et al., 2007:279; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:429; Wild & Swartz, 2012:204).

Adolescence has previously been described as a period of “storm and stress” but this extreme view has recently been replaced by a more balanced perspective (Berk, 2013:205; Louw et al., 2007:281; Silvers, McRae, Gabrieli & Gross, 2012:1243; Wild & Swartz, 2012:204). In essence, adolescence is a normal period of development, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and is considered as the second decade of life (Ahmadi et al., 2009:257; Louw et al., 2007:278; Wild & Swartz, 2012:204). Despite this more balanced perspective, this phase is still characterised by a higher prevalence of adjustment and distress (Moshman, 2011:121).

Adolescence can be a challenging time because many adolescents define themselves through rebellion and anger towards authority, engaging in risky behaviours with alcohol, drugs and unsafe sexual activity, eating disorders, self-harming behaviours, stealing, gang activity, and violence (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Cart, 2010:32). Chronic fatigue, emotional highs and lows, social pressures, insecurity, feeling misunderstood, poor nutrition, romantic crushes and low impulse control are just some of the factors that adolescents may have to deal with on a daily basis (Artar, 2007:1218; Sprenger, 2005:28). In order to understand the adolescent, these factors need to be taken into consideration, alongside the numerous developmental tasks they naturally face.

It has been proven that bullying has a negative effect on the development of adolescents, and that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616).

## **2.7.1 Developmental characteristics of the adolescent**

Adolescence is a life stage in which significant changes occur in the physical, cognitive, emotional and social domains of development (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:429; Wild & Swartz, 2012:204). These developmental characteristics will be discussed in this section.

### **2.7.1.1 Physical development**

Physical changes occur during puberty as an adolescent's body matures (Wild & Swartz, 2012:204). Puberty is the most important physical change experienced during the life of the adolescent and marks their growth into an adult body and sexual maturation (Wild & Swartz, 2012:206). These physical changes are usually apparent, therefore it is an exposing transition that the adolescent must make (Ahmadi et al., 2009:257). Both boys and girls experience physical changes to their bodies and these occur differently and at different times for each individual (Berk, 2013:204; Wild & Swartz, 2012:206).

Early and late maturation can have a marked influence on the adolescent. Early maturation which can be extremely challenging and these adolescents may feel awkward when surrounded by their peers who are not yet experiencing maturation (Berk, 2013:208; Louw et al., 2007:284; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208).

There are gender specific characteristics unique to early and late maturation (Louw et al., 2007:285). Early maturing boys are viewed as having psychological distress, depression and risky behaviours, but are well-adjusted overall, level-headed, self-confident, self-controlled, attractive and popular (Berk, 2013:208; Louw et al., 2007:285; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208). Boys who experience late maturation may be

described as tense, anxious and attention seeking (James, Ellis, Schlomer & Garber, 2012:690; Louw et al., 2007:286; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208).

On the other hand, early maturing girls are often attractive to older boys but their emotional maturity is not on the same level. Factors such as academic performance problems, early sexual activity and unplanned pregnancy, unpopularity with peers, withdrawal, depression and behaviour problems can be experienced by girls undergoing early maturation (Bonner, 2012:10; Louw et al., 2007:286; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208). Girls experiencing late maturation are usually perceived as physically attractive, popular, lively and more sociable. They also tend to do well academically (Louw et al., 2007:286; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208). However, early maturation may also lead to earlier experimentation with substances and sexual relationships, as stated by Richter (in Wild & Swartz, 2012:208): “In South Africa, boys and girls who are in a more advanced stage of puberty at age 13 are more likely to be smoking, experimenting with drugs, and having sex than are their less developed peers.”

Body image becomes very important during puberty. Many adolescents who are unhappy with their bodies or feel that they do not fit into society’s views of what is physically attractive, tend to diet excessively and develop eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Berk, 2013:211; Dorn, Dahl, Woodward & Biro, 2006:36; Louw et al., 2007:287; Wild & Swartz, 2012:208). The changes in their bodies make adolescents sensitive about their bodies. Many adolescents may face bullying regarding their physical appearance, including weight and shape, and this can be particularly distressing (Lodge & Feldman, 2007:633; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:35).

Important challenges faced by adolescents during physical development are, firstly, to adapt to the changing of their body and secondly the acceptance of these changes in appearance and body while handling the emotional turbulence (Berk, 2013:206; Louw et al., 2007:285). Physical acceptance does not come easily for all adolescents, especially since different stages of maturation are associated with embarrassing features, such as a boy’s voice breaking and a girl’s sudden weight gain (Louw et al., 2007:285).

Physical and emotional changes have a psychological impact on the adolescent (Berk, 2013:206; Louw et al., 2007:287; Wild & Swartz, 2012:20). Due to the psychological factors associated with puberty, it is understandable that puberty triggers emotional, cognitive and behavioural changes (Ahmadi et al., 2009:257).

### **2.7.1.2 Cognitive development**

According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the formal operational stage of cognitive development commences when adolescents develop a more abstract, systematic and scientific way of thinking (Berk, 2013:253). Here, adolescents are able to think about possibilities independently and are able to reason logically and verbally (Wild & Swartz, 2012:211). At this more advanced level of thinking, new challenges arise for the adolescent to reconcile such as self-consciousness, egocentrism, the imaginary audience, personal fable and idealism (Berk, 2013:255).

One of the capacities that will develop due to cognitive development during adolescence is the ability to reflect on their own thoughts. This ability, combined with the physical and psychological changes they are undergoing, lead them to be more self-conscious and focus on themselves more (Berk, 2013:255).

The egocentric thinking that is characteristic of early childhood, tends to diminish as children grow older. During adolescence a new kind of egocentrism emerges – the failure to differentiate between one's own thoughts and the thoughts of others (Artar, 2007:1215; Berk, 2013:255; Louw et al., 2007:306). Moshman (2011:171) suggests that adolescent egocentrism is "nothing special" and that all people are egocentric to some extent. However, Schwartz, Maynard and Uzelac (2008:447) argue that egocentrism may be a powerful influence on behaviour, especially as an adolescent enters a new environment or life situation, for example, the transition from primary school to secondary school. Adolescent egocentrism is comprised of two distorted patterns of reasoning regarding the perceived relation between the self and others,

known as the imaginary audience and the personal fable (Berk, 2013:255; Louw et al., 2007:305; Moshman, 2011:171).

The imaginary audience refers to what the adolescent believes others are thinking of them. They are convinced that those around them are as concerned and focused on their appearance as they themselves are (Louw et al., 2007:306; Schwartz et al., 2008:441). They are unable to differentiate between their own interests and the interests of others (Artar, 2007:1215). In their interactions by means of electronic media, adolescents have an entire virtual world in which to create themselves and may choose to portray themselves in the way that they believe others expect them to be (DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow & Mutanski, 2013:422).

The personal fable is the belief that the individual is special, unique and invincible; that no harm can come to them and that other people couldn't possibly understand what they are experiencing (Berk, 2013:255; Louw et al., 2007:306; Schwartz et al., 2008:441). The manifestation of the personal fable is often seen in risk-taking behaviour and ignorance about the consequences that their behaviours may have.

Adolescents are able to reason and consider possible situations, which enable them to imagine a world of the ideal and of perfection. Adolescents often spend many hours imagining an alternative perfect family, different religions and political and moral systems and they yearn to explore them (Berk, 2013:256; Louw et al., 2007:304). These are often perfect, grand, idealistic imaginations and exist in a world where there is no injustice or discrimination; in essence they exist in the inexperienced adolescents' mind (Berk, 2013:256; Louw et al., 2007:304).

Decision making can be difficult for adolescents because they are now able to consider various options, reason with different solutions and imagine multiple possibilities, making decisions daunting and stressful. They further lack the life experience that may guide them in decision-making. Therefore, they may resort to making a decision based on habit or a friend's opinion, they may also choose to act on impulse or not make a decision at all (Berk, 2013:257; Dansereau, Knight &

Flynn, 2013:275; Louw et al., 2007:307; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:150; Sprenger, 2005:32).

Poor decision making and the personal fable expose adolescents to risky behaviours that may have consequences which could affect them for the rest of their lives (Smith, Xiao & Bechara, 2012:1180). Adolescence is a period characterised by high levels of risk taking (Fosco, Stormshak, Dishion & Winter, 2012:202; Silvers et al., 2012:1243; Smith et al., 2012:1180). An “at risk” adolescent is one who faces continuous challenges and disruptions in relationships with parents, peers and their school environment (Agosto et al., 2012:39).

A South African survey to research the risky behaviours of adolescents from grade eight to 11 produced the following results (Reddy, in Wild & Swartz, 2012:205):

- Substance use: 30 per cent of the respondents had smoked cigarettes, 13 per cent had smoked dagga and 29 per cent had engaged in binge drinking within 30 days prior to the research.
- Sexual behaviour: 13 per cent reported having sex by the age of 13 and 69 per cent of sexually active adolescents did not use condoms consistently.
- Violence: 36 per cent reported having been bullied in the past month and 15 per cent reported carrying weapons.
- Traffic safety: 38 per cent reported that within a period of 30 days, they had been driven by someone who was under the influence of alcohol.
- Eating behaviours: 20 per cent of the respondents were overweight and eight per cent were underweight.
- Physical activity: 34 per cent had no physical education in schools and 29 per cent watched television or played video games for more than three hours per day.
- Suicide related behaviours: 21 per cent had attempted suicide.

Incidents of car accidents due to texting while driving have been reported all over the world (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:13).

Adolescents who are at risk in a number of other areas of their lives are more likely to become involved with cyberbullying, either as victims or as cyberbullies (Agosto et al., 2012:39). In terms of adolescents' online risky behaviour, Trolley and Hanel (2010:8) and Welrave and Heirman (2011:61) report the following:

- As much as 71 per cent of adolescents have established online profiles on sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter.
- A total of 69 per cent of adolescents regularly receive messages from unknown senders, and most do not tell their parents.
- Roughly 64 per cent of adolescents add photos and videos of themselves onto social networking sites.
- Adolescents add personal information to their social networking sites, such as their address and phone number.

The intensity of adolescents' emotions may override their capacity for cognitive control, leading to a lower control over their desire for novel yet risky experiences (Ahmadi et al., 2009:258; Berk, 2013:191). Many adolescents may thus engage in cyberbullying, which is also considered a risky behaviour (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Cassim, 2013:2).

### **2.7.1.3 Emotional development**

Adolescents experience their emotions intensely and go through various emotional highs and lows on a daily basis (Ahmadi et al., 2009:261; Moshman, 2011:172; Silvers et al., 2012:1235; Sprenger, 2005:32). A combination of emotions, and the intensity and frequency with which they are experienced, can all contribute to the moodiness of the adolescent (Berk, 2013:207; Louw et al., 2007:319).

Adolescents are more inclined to experience variations in moods than younger children and adults. An adolescent's emotions can switch from being positive to negative and then back again multiple times a day (Berk, 2013:207; Louw et al., 2007:319). Adolescents may also experience emotional outbursts, which may be

linked to hormonal changes during puberty (Fosco et al., 2012:202; Louw et al., 2007:319).

Although all adolescents, and in fact all people, experience negative emotions from time to time in their lives, there are emotions felt by the adolescent which are cause for immediate concern. These emotions include a depressed mood, negative views of the self, the world and the future, guilt and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness (Houlberg, Henry, Merten & Robinson, 2011:112).

In essence, the adolescent's inability to regulate their emotions causes them to occasionally act without thinking and make impulsive decisions. This lack of consideration of consequences could be a reason for bullying (Dansereau et al., 2013:276; Frey, Edstrom & Hirschstein, 2010:405). For example, an adolescent girl may experience sadness about ending a relationship and experience anger when finding out her ex-boyfriend is now dating one of her friends. She retaliates by getting a few friends to send offensive messages to this particular girl on Facebook (Bauman & Newman, 2013:38; Sprenger, 2005:32).

The "mood swings" that adolescents experience can further be influenced by cognitive and environmental factors and are linked to the situation that they find themselves in (Berk, 2013:207; Louw et al., 2007:319). Adolescents, for example, tend to focus more on themselves and may react differently in different contexts, for example at school, among friends and in their home. Families play an important role in the adolescent's emotional development with regard to support, nurturing and acceptance (Houlberg et al., 2011:112).

#### **2.7.1.4 Social development**

Adolescents' social development is moulded through family, peers and the self (Berk, 2013:579). In this section, each of these will be discussed.

- **The family**

Adolescents benefit from a warm, protective family bond which includes positive relationships with parents, siblings and grandparents (Berk, 2013:208; Wild & Swartz, 2012:215). Connectedness to parents may serve a positive purpose for adolescents, such as emotional development and support, as well as protection from depressed mood (Fosco et al., 2012:210; Houltberg et al., 2011:111). However, parents and adolescents may experience conflict and stress in their family life, often arising from various developmental tasks which need to be mastered by the adolescent (Berk, 2013:579). Even though the relationship with their parents may be positive, it does not necessarily mean that adolescents will confide in their parents about their experiences with cyberbullying (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Slonje & Smith, 2008:153; Willard, 2006:55).

Although society and the media tend to portray the adolescent-parent relationship as a very stressful one, evidence indicates that these extremely stressful relationships are the exception and not the norm (Wild & Swartz, 2012:215). Problems may arise due to adolescents developing deeper reasoning in situations and being able to gather facts and build a case, which may result in argumentativeness and conflict with parents (Berk, 2013:208; Louw et al., 2007:303). Parents may not always understand that their children are argumentative due to their strong desire for independence (Berk, 2013:208; Louw et al., 2007:304).

As part of an adolescents' strong desire to be independent, there is a need for emotional and social independence. As a result adolescents want to rely more on themselves and less on their parents for support and guidance, and make informed, logical and well thought out decisions for themselves without the assistance of parents (Berk, 2013:579; Louw et al., 2007:303).

As children grow into adolescents, they tend to spend less time with their parents even though they are still financially dependent on them. Adolescents begin a process called psychological separation, in which they desire to spend more time with friends and peers than they do with their parents (Artar, 2007:1216; Berk,

2013:579; Louw et al., 2007:326; McElhaney, Antonishak & Allen, 2008:720). Even during times when adolescents do spend time with their parents, they are constantly checking their phones and maintaining contact with their peers (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:9). On the other hand, adolescents also have a desire to be alone, particularly when they are feeling overly emotional, and often escape into their online worlds where they can escape from their surroundings and emotions (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:14).

Some parents may feel threatened by their adolescents' need to be with friends or to be alone and in response become more controlling, which results in further conflict. When parents are able to provide the adolescent with the confidence to explore relationships outside the family within reason, less conflict is experienced (Artar, 2007:1216; Berk, 2013:579; Louw et al., 2007:326; Wild & Swartz, 2012:216).

- **The peer group**

Peer relationships can encourage successful social functioning throughout adolescence, and can assist adolescents to develop interpersonal skills which are necessary for friendships and romantic relationships later in life (Berk, 2013:619; McElhaney et al., 2008:720).

During the phase of adolescence the social world widens, and peers as well as acceptance into the peer group, become increasingly important in the lives of adolescents (Cho & Chung, 2012:527; Kingery et al., 2011:217; McElhaney et al., 2008:720). In essence, peer acceptance refers to the likeability of a person; the extent to which that person is viewed as a person worthy of having a friendship with (Berk, 2013:619). When children are not accepted by their peers, they may present with a wide range of social problems and are typically at risk for peer victimisation (Berk, 2013:620).

Adolescents highly regard the opinion of their peers and at times this opinion is considered above that of their parents (Goossens & Jackson, 2006:180; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:411; Wild & Swartz, 2012:220). The relationships between adolescents

become so important that adolescents may experience loneliness when they are not surrounded by their peers (Woodhouse, Dykas & Cassidy, 2011:274). However, friendships may also come with pressures and challenges as adolescents are faced with peer pressure and the need to conform to the peer group (Berk, 2013:625; Geldard & Geldard, 2008:263; Louw et al., 2007:332; Scholte & Van Aken, 2006:175; Wild & Swartz, 2012:220).

Peer conformity can be described as an individual's tendency to give in to social (or peer) pressure (Louw et al., 2007:332). Peer pressure can be as positive as it can be negative because, logically, adolescents can be influenced to do positive things as much as they can be influenced to do negative things. On the negative side, peer pressure can be dangerous due to the adolescents' desire for novel and risky experiences coupled with the fact that they have not yet developed the necessary self-confidence and independence to make informed choices (Louw et al., 2007:332). Peers can affect an adolescents' decision making ability and have a negative influence on their identity development (Dansereau et al., 2013:279; Louw et al., 2007:333).

On the positive side, adolescents can be influenced by peers to join extra mural activities and positive social clubs (Cho & Chung, 2012:523; Perry-Parrish & Zeman, 2011:137; Wild & Swartz, 2012:220). Additionally, conforming to the peer group provides a sense of security in their desire for autonomy (Louw et al., 2007:332).

Another area of conformity that adolescents are confronted by is their fear of missing out (popularly referred to as FOMO). FOMO is the compulsive need to constantly monitor if there are any messages on one's smart phone or social networking sites (Cohen, 2011:140). Should there be photos or messages added on social networking sites from which the adolescent is absent, their anxiety may escalate to unhealthy levels (Cohen, 2011:140; Ross, 2013:7).

Friendships become more reciprocal and intimate during adolescence. As friendships are formed and the bond between friends is very strong, adolescents believe that no one understands them the way that their friends do (Kingery et al.,

2011:207; McElhaney et al., 2008:720; Perry-Parrish & Zeman, 2011:148). Adolescents make choices about the kind of friends they would like to have and they can look for friends beyond the classroom environment. Many adolescents seek to find friends online (McElhaney et al., 2008:720). In this way, technology becomes another tool used to make adolescents feel unaccepted or excluded, for example, the spreading of rumours and the exclusion an adolescent may feel when not invited to events that they see on social networking sites (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). Peer pressure can thus be a main contributing factor in school violence and cyberbullying in South Africa (Prinsloo, 2008:30).

Most adolescent victims of cyberbullying know, or think they know, who is victimising them, and the perpetrator is often within their group of friends. This situation is particularly devastating given the adolescents' strong need for acceptance (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Solberg et al., 2007:449). In fact, in one study up to 22 per cent of adolescents indicated that they have lost a friend due to cyberbullying amongst each other on social networking sites (Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:66).

Peers can, on the other hand, also be a source of support for others who are victims of cyberbullying. Having a close friendship has been known to minimise victimisation and increase self-esteem (Woodhouse et al., 2011:288). Adolescents can also be educated to positively influence each other to report cyberbullying and expose the bully and in so doing, receive the intervention that they require (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:620; Rigby, 2010:27; Sabella, 2012:76; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:86).

- **Development of the self**

An important task for all adolescents is to decide who they are, what they want from life and to develop their own values. To do this, adolescents need to develop a sense of self-concept and self-esteem and develop their identity (Wild & Swartz, 2012:233).

Self-concept refers to the perception of oneself or an understanding of their personal traits (Wild & Swartz, 2012:233). Adolescents move from comparing themselves to

others, to focusing more on how they truly see themselves (Louw et al., 2007:314; Wild & Swartz, 2012:233).

Self-esteem refers to the degree of self-like and positive view that one has of oneself (Berk, 2013:461; Louw et al., 2007:315; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616; Savı Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2406; Wild & Swartz, 2012:233). There are many factors which influence self-esteem, such as peer acceptance, romantic relationships, adolescents' changing bodies, familial stresses, the confusion of experiencing multiple emotions, the transition from primary to secondary school and academic performance (Berk, 2013:462; Louw et al., 2007:315; Molloy, Ram & Gest, 2011:1591; Plunkett, Henry, Robinson, Behnke & Falcon, 2007:770; Wild & Swartz, 2012:234).

Low self-esteem may cause adolescents to be anxious, aggressive, depressed, to have failure tendencies, to be pessimistic and to have negative thoughts and feelings about their future and the world in general (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Berk, 2013:463; Savı Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2407). Victims of cyberbullying tend to have lower self-esteem than non-victims. It may be that the experience of bullying causes low self-esteem but, ironically, that having low self-esteem can also make a person susceptible to victimisation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616).

Constructing an identity involves accepting a clear and consistent definition of who you are, what you believe and value, the direction that you choose for your life and where you fit into society (Berk, 2013:469; Wild & Swartz, 2012:234). For adolescents, this a very important phase but also a temporary period of confusion in which they question existing values and explore and experiment with alternative values in order to see what "fits" best with them (Louw et al., 2007:309; Markstrom, 2010:530; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615).

Identity confusion occurs when adolescents are unsure about themselves and the direction that their life is taking, causing them to struggle with self-confidence and their ability to make decisions, which leads to anxiety and aggression (Louw et al., 2007:310). There are many factors which contribute to identity formation, such as cognitive development, parenting, peers, school, the community, culture, exploration

opportunities as well as personality (Louw et al., 2007:313; Wild & Swartz, 2012:237).

An appealing feature of the online world is that individuals can be whoever they desire to be and can portray themselves as they would like to be seen. The identity portrayed in the online world can be a different identity to one that is lived in the offline world (Hongladarom, 2011:533; Welrave & Heirman, 2011:62). At times there are situations in the life of the adolescent that they do not feel comfortable talking about to another individual in person, or talking about at all. The online world enables them to explore and express this part of themselves that they feel they need to keep hidden in the offline world (DeHaan et al., 2013:422). However, for some adolescents, the line between the online self and the real offline self is vague (Hongladarom, 2011:534).

#### **2.7.1.5 Moral development**

Moral development involves the construction of a personal value system, one which should assist the adolescent in practising socially and morally responsible behaviour and empathy (Louw et al., 2013:340; Wild & Swartz, 2012:224). Adolescents' cognitive capacity to think abstractly and hypothetically enables them to reflect on moral values. According to Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, early adolescents still tend to follow moral rules in order to earn approval, where older adolescents, from around 16 to 18 years, begin to internalise moral rules and are concerned with living up to the moral standards of parents and society (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:392-393). Moral rules and norms become part of the adolescents' identity and motivate their behaviour.

The level of moral reasoning that a person acquires will determine the person's actions in certain situations. Moral reasoning can be influenced by different factors, such as the family, peers and the person's capacity for showing empathy (Louw et al., 2007:273).

Parents play an important role in socialising children in developing moral reasoning. However, adolescents' use of technology is often unsupervised by parents, which provides them with limited opportunities for guiding the adolescent amidst the possible influences that the adolescent is exposed to (Ndlovu, 2014:5; O'Keeffe & Clark-Pearson, 2011:801).

A child's interaction with peers has an influence on his or her moral development and most adolescents appear to behave antisocially due to peer pressure (Louw et al., 2007:273; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:393). The peer group can play a strong role in bullying, for example by modelling, encouraging or validating aggressive and bullying behaviours and by peer pressure to conform to such group norms (Bayer & Uçanok, 2012:2353; Dixon, 2011:5; Rigby, 2010:142, Smith, 2010:142).

Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's emotional state and context (Steffgen et al., 2011:643). Empathy promotes pro-social behaviour and limits anti-social behaviour (Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141). Numerous studies have proven that the bully has low levels of empathy towards the victim (Ang & Goh, 2010:387; Cart, 2010:33; Chaux et al., 2009:32; Steffgen et al., 2011:646; Thornberg et al., 2012:328; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:46).

Emotional intelligence, a form of social intelligence, could support a person in making decisions that are supportive of moral rules and norms in society. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to monitor one's own, and others' feelings and emotions, determine any differences and allow this insight to guide thinking and actions (Rigby, 2010:47; Louw & Louw, 2007:244). However, in a cyberbullying situation, anonymity prevents the victim's reaction from being seen or heard by the perpetrator, making it difficult for adolescents to utilise their emotional intelligence skills and react appropriately (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:127; Bauman & Newman, 2013:28; Naruskov et al., 2012:325; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Steffgen et al., 2011:644; Twyman et al., 2010:195). This lack of emotional intelligence can be interpreted as a lack of empathy (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:7; Slonje & Smith, 2008:148; Smith et al., 2008:377).

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

Bullying has been a problem affecting school children for decades. The past two decades have seen phenomenal advances in technology and there has been an increase in the use of electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones in interpersonal communication. It has been found that adolescents spend as much time interacting through electronic, or online, communication, as they do in their face-to-face interactions. Such technology has unlimited availability, accessibility and anonymity and these characteristics have enabled traditional face-to-face bullying to translate into the online world resulting in what is known as cyberbullying.

This chapter focused on cyberbullying as a phenomenon. The phenomenon of traditional bullying was described as background, focusing on its nature, causes, the role players involved and categories of bullying. Cyberbullying was defined and then described in terms of electronic media used and the types of cyberbullying, as well as how it differs from traditional bullying. The potential impact of cyberbullying was highlighted and an overview of adolescence, as the life stage relevant for the study, was provided.

In Chapter 3 the research methodology, the ethical considerations for the study as well as the research findings will be presented.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The increase in the use of electronic communication media has resulted in bullying evolving from the face-to-face methods of traditional bullying into virtual methods, known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has certain characteristics that set it apart from traditional bullying and that could potentially result in more malicious forms of bullying, while reaching an almost limitless number of victims. The developmental characteristics of adolescents and the increase in their use of electronic media could make them more vulnerable to exposure to and to the effects of cyberbullying. In this chapter the empirical results of the study, focusing on the experiences of a group of adolescent participants regarding exposure to cyberbullying, will be presented and discussed. First, an overview of the research methodology and the ethical considerations for the study will be presented.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology included the research approach, type of research, research design, study population and sampling, data collection and analysis, and a pilot study.

##### 3.2.1 Research approach

The research was conducted according to a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to explore a variety of dimensions within the social world as well as the meaning that people attach to various situations (Leedy & Ormrod, in Delpont & Fouché, 2011:64; Mason, 2007:1). The researcher attempted to explore and describe the experiences of a group of adolescents relating to their exposure to cyberbullying. A qualitative research

approach was found to be beneficial in obtaining rich information on the personal experiences regarding cyberbullying from the participants.

This study was an exploratory research study in order to gather information to understand an area of interest (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95), which in the case of the study was adolescents' experiences related to cyberbullying. Furthermore, the study was descriptive in nature as the researcher intended to provide rich information on what the phenomenon of cyberbullying entailed for the participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2010:41-42). Through knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon, social workers and other professionals can develop strategies to handle this problem in practice.

### **3.2.2 Type of research**

The research was based on applied research, as the researcher planned the study in order to begin a process of change in an area which is seen as problematic (Bless, 2004:37; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94). The literature indicates that cyberbullying could have extremely negative consequences for its victims, as well as for the perpetrators of bullying and the need for future research regarding cyberbullying was stressed in recent literature on the topic. By gaining knowledge about the phenomenon of cyberbullying and its potential consequences for victims thereof, the researcher aims to make a contribution to addressing a problem in practice (Baer et al., 2012:733; Bullock & Wong-Lo, 2011:69; Burnham et al., 2011:26; Welrave and Heirman, 2011:69).

### **3.2.3 Research design**

The research design guided the decisions that the researcher selected or developed as suitable for the specific research goal (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:307). The researcher made use of a case study research design as she wanted to explore and understand the experiences of adolescents with regards to cyberbullying. The case study research design allowed the researcher to learn and understand the

experiences of the participants and the meaning the participants gave to these experiences (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320; Neuman, 2011:177).

The researcher obtained information from multiple cases. Thus a collective case study as a design was followed, which also allowed for comparison between cases (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:322; Neuman, 2011:177). The researcher interviewed ten participants and could make comparison between the cases.

### **3.2.4 Study population and sampling**

The study population, thus those individuals that have specific characteristics necessary for the research (Strydom, 2011a:223), for this study were adolescents enrolled at a secondary school in Tshwane, and who had been victims of cyberbullying. These adolescents would be able to provide information that was relevant to the study.

From the population, purposive sampling was implemented to select ten adolescents as a smaller section that would form the sample of the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2010:147; Strydom 2011a:223-224). Participants were selected for the sample according to the following sampling criteria:

- Participants were between the ages of 13 and 18 years.
- Participants were both male and female.
- Participants were victims of cyberbullying.
- Participants were not on the client list of the social work office.
- Participants could have been from all population groups.

After the first participant had been selected according to the above criteria, this participant was asked to identify another learner that would comply with the same sampling criteria. Participants were thus also selected by means of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was regarded as an applicable sampling method because cyberbullying is seen as a hidden phenomenon (Beale & Hall, 2007:12; Snakenborg et al., 2011:90). By using snowball sampling one participant (who had

experience of the phenomenon to be studied) was used as a starting point in making contact with other potential participants who had been exposed to cyberbullying (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393; Hutson & Kolbe, 2010:142; Neuman, 2011:269).

The researcher intended to select ten participants for the study, but the sample size would be adjusted depending on when data saturation occurred (Creswell, 2014:189). After ten interviews, the researcher was of the opinion that no new insights or information were obtained. Participation in the research took place on a voluntary basis and, probably due to the secrecy involved in cyberbullying as a hidden phenomenon (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Slonje & Smith, 2008:153), the researcher experienced that a number of potential participants were not willing to participate in the research. The final sample for the study consisted of eight adolescent girls and two adolescent boys.

### **3.2.5 Data collection method**

The interview proved to be an excellent data collection technique to gather information and promote understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ruane, 2005:146). The interview allowed the researcher to engage in a conversation with the participants for the collection of rich information from the personal experiences of the participants (Greef, 2011:342).

The semi-structured one-to-one interview, guided by an interview schedule, was utilised to collect data for the research study (Greeff, 2011:351-352). The interview schedule (attached as Addendum A) was developed according to information found to be relevant in a thorough literature review, and the questions were placed in a logical order. The semi-structured interview was thus guided by a set of predetermined questions, however allowed for flexibility in the conversation. When additional themes were identified during the interviews, the researcher ensured to explore those themes.

Semi-structured interviews were regarded as a suitable method to collect data for this study as this enabled the researcher to obtain rich data on the experiences of a

sample of adolescents with regards to cyberbullying. The researcher also looked at the differences in experiences amongst participants and explored whether the participants themselves were also involved in the cyberbullying of others.

### **3.2.6 Data analysis**

Interviews were tape-recorded in order to accurately report on the experiences of the adolescents regarding cyberbullying (Ames & Diepstra, 2010:407). The researcher ensured to have permission from the participants and their parents for recording the interviews. The researcher also took detailed field notes and transcribed each interview. It was during the transcription phase that the researcher identified new themes which had emerged (Ames & Diepstra, 2010:407).

When analysing the data, the researcher made use of the data analysis process as represented in Schurink et al. (2011:403). The researcher followed an eight step plan as prescribed by the authors in which she prepared, organised, reduced and presented the data (Schurink et al., 2011:404-418).

In preparing for the interviews, the researcher obtained the permission of the participants and their parents to record the interviews. The researcher planned for a quiet setting for the recordings as well as for a colour-coding system for the different interviews to ensure that data was retrieved with ease (Schurink et al., 2011:404).

The preliminary analysis of the data happened during the interviews with the participants, as well as with the organising of the data between interviews. The continuous analysis of the data assisted the researcher to collect rich data that led to emerging themes (Schurink et al., 2011:405).

After each interview had been completed, the recording was transcribed and the notes that were made during interviews were also re-written in order to ensure that they were legible at a later date. This assisted the researcher in keeping the process of data analysis organised (Schurink et al., 2011:408). The researcher reflected on

the data, analysis, on any ethical conflicts and on her frame of mind while organising the data (Schurink et al., 2011:406).

The researcher only transcribed what was necessary for the research question in order to have a concise and accurate report on the phenomenon (Schurink et al., 2011:408). Once the transcriptions and notes were completed, the researcher read over the information repeatedly in order to get an overview of the data in its totality and look out for additional themes or information that was not seen before (Schurink et al., 2011:409). Making notes assisted the researcher in identifying main ideas from the data gathered during the interviews with the adolescents.

Next, the researcher organised the information into different categories and themes that had emerged during the process of reading and re-reading. The researcher identified themes, sub-themes and patterns and organised them in order to write the final narrative, while continuously evaluating the usefulness of data to the findings of the study (Schurink et al., 2011:410, 415). When interpreting the data the researcher ensured that the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying had been documented and portrayed from the view of the participants and the meaning that they had attached to their situation (Schurink et al., 2011:417).

The process of data analysis is an integral part of writing up the data and writing the final research report (Schurink et al., 2011:419). The findings of the research study based on the analysis of the data, is presented in this research report.

### **3.2.7 Trustworthiness**

As explained by Lincoln and Guba (in Schurink et al., 2011:419-421), in order for research to be considered high quality research, there are certain factors which need to be considered. In order to ensure the credibility and authenticity of the study, the researcher ensured that at all times the phenomenon of cyberbullying and the complexities that surround it were described and explained as accurately as possible. This was done by continuously consulting numerous resources regarding knowledge and findings related to studies on cyberbullying (Ballan, Cody & Franklin,

2010:356). During interviews, member validation was utilised to ensure that the researcher understood the participant correctly in order to provide the most accurate and true account of their experiences regarding cyberbullying (Bryman, 2012:391; Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006:454).

In terms of transferability, the researcher considered whether the findings from a study could be applied and understood in other areas (Schurink et al., 2011:420). However, this was a small scale study which made use of ten participants. Cases were compared against each other but findings could not be generalised to other settings.

To ensure dependability, efforts were made to keep the research study logical, well documented and audited. The researcher ensured to keep a paper trail of all actions pertaining to the research study. Interviews, consultations, fieldwork notes, recordings as well as decisions were well documented and organised to make them easily accessible (Ballan et al., 2010:368; Bryman, 2012:392; Lietz et al., 2006:450). The researcher also remained up to date with news articles and new information regarding cyberbullying. In addressing conformability, the findings reported were supported by evidence in literature and in the form of recordings and field notes (Ballan et al., 2010:363).

Yardley (in Bryman, 2012:393) explains that researchers should also maintain a reflexive stance during a research study. An objective, sensitive and non-judgemental stance was held by the researcher throughout the research study. This helped to prevent bias, as the researcher was aware that personal perspectives could impact on the findings should a researcher not make a conscious effort to prevent it (Lietz et al., 2006:448).

### **3.2.8 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted to allow the researcher to determine whether the study was feasible and whether the instrument which was to be used to collect the data would work effectively (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:73; Neuman, 2011:312). A pilot

study enabled the researcher to become aware of practical aspects related to the research and misunderstandings that could occur during data collection interviews. The researcher conducted a pilot study in order for the interview schedule to be changed, if needed, and to ensure that it was easily understood and questions could be answered smoothly and easily by the participants. The pilot study was conducted with one adolescent who complied with the sampling criteria for the study. The information obtained in the pilot study did not form part of the research findings for the study.

### **3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research should aim to improve the world, cause no harm, be respectful to participants and ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs (Cuskelly, 2005:99). It is vital that “[r]esearch should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises and well-accepted conventions and expectations between all parties involved in a research project” (Strydom, 2011b:113). Therefore, researchers within the social sciences field need to realise the importance of conducting research in an ethical manner. Additionally, researchers need to be clear on what constitutes proper and improper research (Babbie in Strydom, 2011b:114).

The following ethical considerations were regarded as of specific relevance to this research study:

#### **3.3.1 Avoidance of harm**

The research activity did not harm or pose unreasonable risks to subjects and was executed in accordance with a fundamental ethical obligation to safeguard the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of participants (Neuman, 2011:146; Ruane, 2005:17). The researcher has, at all times during the research procedure, protected the rights and best interests of the participants by adhering to ethical standards. The participants were properly informed about the boundaries and potential risk of taking part in the study before the semi-structured interviews commenced.

Cyberbullying could be a sensitive topic for adolescents due to the negative physical, social and emotional effects it might have on victims (Cart, 2010:34; Stewart & Fritch, 2011:81). Therefore, the researcher ensured that there were procedures set in place to prevent emotional distress during the research study. These procedures included the freedom to withdraw from the study should the participant feel the need to do so as well as access to counselling by a social worker that was contracted for the purpose, should they have required such services once the interviews had been completed. These services were also available to any participants should they have chosen to withdraw.

As explained by Leedy and Ormrod (in Delport & Fouché, 2011:63), by not using participants currently on the client database, the researcher was able to remain unattached and unbiased, thereby avoiding any conflict of interest during the study.

### **3.3.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent**

Informed consent was obtained in order to ensure that the participants who took part in the study did so of their own free will (Babbie, 2007:63; Ruane, 2005:19). The researcher ensured that the participants were fully aware of all the aspects regarding the study, the goal and purpose of the study, how the information would be collected and what would happen with the information once it had been collected. The participants, as well as their parents, were made aware of the fact that the interviews would be tape recorded in order for the researcher to accurately capture the participants' experiences regarding cyberbullying.

The participants had the right to choose whether or not they wanted to be a part of the study. The researcher did not force any participant to take part in the study and acted on the instruction that if a participant had chosen to withdraw from the interview, the researcher would have allowed the participant to do freely.

The participants were requested to sign a letter of informed assent (attached as Addendum B). The letter of informed assent included information on the goal and the procedures of the research, as well as possible advantages and risks (Strydom,

2011b:115-116), taking into account that cyberbullying could be a sensitive topic for the participants. Those participants, who were under the age of 18, were also requested to have a letter of informed consent signed by their parents granting them permission to take part in the study (attached as Addendum C). The request for permission to tape record interviews was also included in these letters.

The researcher obtained permission to do the research from the principal of the school where the research was conducted. Permission was also obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (Letter of permission attached as Addendum D).

### **3.3.3 Deception of subjects and/or participants**

The researcher made sure to guard against any form of deception as far as possible. Should deception have occurred the researcher would have either corrected it immediately or as soon as it was brought to the researcher's attention (Neuman, 2011:151; Strydom, 2011b:119). These measures were especially important as cyberbullying is a hidden phenomenon and snowball sampling was used as a result. Initial information about the research was thus provided by other participants, which could lead to misunderstanding.

### **3.3.4 Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality**

Privacy was ensured as the interviews were completed in a private room where only the participant and the researcher were present. Participants also had the right to privacy which allowed them to determine what they were willing to share about their experiences regarding cyberbullying (Strydom, 2011b:119). Confidentiality was upheld by the researcher handling the information in a confidential manner (Babbie, 2007:65; Neuman, 2011:153; Strydom, 2011b:120). Names and any other identifying details of the participants were not made known. Anonymity could not be guaranteed due to the fact that a semi-structured interview took place in person. After completion of the research, the data would be stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria in accordance with the policy of the university.

### **3.3.5 Debriefing of participants**

Debriefing after the completion of the interviews provided the participants with the opportunity to work through both their experiences of the study as well the residual emotions (Babbie, 2007:67; Ballan et al., 2010:367). Debriefing also allowed participants to ask any questions which they might have, as well as correct any misunderstandings (Strydom, 2011b:122). As the participants in the study were victims of cyberbullying, the researcher remained aware of the sensitive nature of the topic and of the many negative effects that victims might experience. She thus ensured that all participants had an opportunity for debriefing, conducted by the researcher personally.

### **3.3.6 Actions and competence of researchers**

Researchers should not only be skilled and competent to conduct their research, but should also remain objective, stay away from value judgements, be aware of the different values, norms and cultures of the community within which they are doing their research (Strydom, 2011b:123).

The researcher ensured that she was knowledgeable with regards to the existing literature about cyberbullying. The researcher used the knowledge and the experience that she has gained in the past five years in working with adolescents in a school setting and conducted the interviews in a manner which allowed the participants to feel at ease to share their experiences related to being victims of cyberbullying with the researcher. The researcher also ensured to actively listen and show interest in what the participants said and remained supportive towards the participants throughout the entire research process (Ruane, 2005:147). The recordings of the interviews were transcribed accurately and the research was conducted according to the research methodology best suited to this study.

The researcher remained aware of plagiarism and the seriousness of this offence. She ensured to be honest and transparent with any problems and pitfalls

experienced during the study in order to ensure that future studies would benefit from having such information (Babbie, 2007:69).

### **3.3.7 Publication of findings**

The research findings are available in the form of a research report in such a way that it could be of use to parents and other professionals. This report was compiled as accurately and objectively as possible (Strydom, 2011b:126). The research report is available at the University of Pretoria.

## **3.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The empirical findings of the study are discussed in this section. A brief description of the biographical details the research participants is provided, followed by a discussion of the empirical findings according to main themes and subthemes, based on the analysis of the data collected by means of the semi-structured interviews with the research participants.

### **3.4.1 Biographical profile of the participants**

The sample of the study consisted of 10 participants who were selected according to certain sampling criteria. Participants were identified by means of snowball sampling and the first 10 participants who were willing to voluntarily take part in the study, formed the sample for the study. The biographical details of the participants are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Biographical profile of participants**

Participants	Gender	Race	School grade	Age
1	Female	Coloured	9	14
2	Female	Coloured	9	15
3	Female	Black	8	13
4	Female	Black	8	13
5	Female	Coloured	8	13
6	Female	Black	8	13
7	Male	Black	11	17
8	Female	Coloured	12	17
9	Male	Coloured	12	18
10	Female	Black	12	17

Eight female and two male participants took part in the study. Five participants were coloured and five were black. The ages of the participants ranged between 13 and 18 years, with the ages 13 years (four participants) and 17 years (three participants) being the most prevalent age groups. Participants were from all the five school grades of secondary school, however more participants were from the lowest and the highest grades in the school (four participants from grade eight and three participants from grade 12 respectively).

### **3.4.2 Empirical results of the study**

Data for the study was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview schedule. The interviews were voice recorded and transcribed in order to analyse the data. In this section, the findings of the study will be discussed according to the main themes and sub-themes that were identified during the process of data analysis.

## **Theme 1: Participants' opinions on what constitutes as cyberbullying**

Participants mainly understood cyberbullying to be the sending of electronic messages which contained gossip, rumours or other information which would make people feel bad about themselves. For the participants, these messages included name calling, demands for money or objects, posting embarrassing photos or videos on Facebook or other websites, and also encouraging others to comment on information that had been written on the Internet. The view of one of the participants provides a comprehensive picture of the different aspects involved in cyberbullying:

*“Usually cyberbullying is people antagonising other people over the Internet, making them feel like they don’t deserve to live, like they are not worthy, they are just like a cockroach. You can write anything about that person and not consider their feelings or anything. You can even involve their families where the family image is destroyed and there are family fights because of it. Even though most of the stuff is just rumours, those rumours affect the whole family.” (Participant 7)*

The views of the participants show an understanding of the definition of cyberbullying as the use of electronic media (mobile phones and the Internet) to intentionally attack a specific person whereby harm is caused to the self and relationships (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:33). The intended harm to the person and to others was evident in the participants' views of cyberbullying.

## **Theme 2: The nature of cyberbullying experienced**

The participants in this study were exposed to cyberbullying through different electronic media. The content of the messages conveyed through electronic media were mostly harmful text messages, although some participants were subjected to embarrassing photographs being posted via electronic media.

### **Sub-theme 2.1: Electronic media used for cyberbullying**

All of the participants explained that they had experienced cyberbullying through either text or multimedia messages received through a variety of social media such

as WhatsApp, BBM and MXit. All participants had been cyberbullied through rumours which had been written on social networking sites, which they identified as being Facebook, Twitter, Stelemams, Outoilet and Tsamaya. Table 2 indicates the participants' experiences of cyberbullying through the various electronic mediums.

**Table 2: Media used for cyberbullying**

Partici- pant	Text / multi- media message	Whats- app	BBM	Face- book	Outoilet	Stele- mams	Tsa- maya	MXit	Twitter
1	X	X		X				X	
2	X	X		X	X				
3	X					X	X		
4	X			X		X			
5	X			X		X			
6	X			X		X			
7				X	X				X
8			X	X	X				
9	X				X				
10							X		

In Table 2 it is indicated that the most common types of cyberbullying experienced by the participants were through text messages and Facebook. The second most common type of cyberbullying was bullying through the websites Stelemams and Outoilet. This is followed by the other social networking sites as discussed above.

Facebook and Twitter are well-known and popular social networking sites that often form part of the everyday life and are used to form friendships and keep in touch with others (Carlowe, 2008:20; Snakenborg et al., 2011:21; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:5). Because of its popularity, both good and harmful messages can be viewed by almost unlimited numbers of people (Shaw & Cross, 2012:142; Stauffer et al., 2012:353). Other social networking sites, namely Outoilet, Stelemams and Tsamaya, were described by the participants as websites that people could visit and write anything about anyone, while the users of these websites could use a nickname or an alias to hide their identity.

The widespread use and accessibility of electronic media as a new system in the lives of adolescents (Cohen, 2011:140; Ratner, 2012:50) gives an indication of the extent to which this system can affect the other systems in which the adolescent is involved in. According to the ecological systems theory, systems are interrelated and have a direct influence on one another (Berk, 2013:29). What happens in one system, such as the world of electronic media, may have an effect on the other systems in the adolescent's life. Another sub-theme related to the nature of cyberbullying, was the types or the manner in which cyberbullying was experienced.

### **Sub-theme 2.2: Types of cyberbullying experienced**

From the responses of the participants, two main types of cyberbullying could be identified, namely flaming and denigration. Flaming is intended to evoke an emotional reaction from victims, while denigration is used to attack or create a distorted view of the victim's character (Agosto et al., 2012:38-39; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:69). Participants reported that the cyberbullying mostly began with text messages containing rumours about the participants themselves or their families which were written on social networking sites such as Facebook, Outoilet, Stelemams, Tsamaya and MXit. The following quotes provide examples of the rumours:

*"They said my sister likes to seduce men and that she is no good ... she is pregnant and she has HIV."* (Participant 1)

*"They wrote that I sleep around ... They also wrote that I must have AIDS."* (Participant 2)

*"... they went on Facebook and wrote that I am pregnant and I do not know who the father is and I have been sleeping around with other guys. People have also written about my dad saying that he is having an affair and that he has lots of girlfriends besides my mother."* (Participant 8)

*"... they put on there [Stelemams] that I have a short school skirt because I want the boys to look at me and my legs. They also wrote things like I have a big bum and big boobs."* (Participant 6)

The above quotes illustrate the general harmful intent of the messages, which is characteristic of cyberbullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Trolley & Hamel, 2010:33). The quotes further show that the harmful messages were not only directly aimed at the participants, but also contained rumours about family members of the participants.

In addition to harmful text messages, some participants also experienced the placement of embarrassing photos on social media (via text messages) and social networking sites (via Facebook, Stelemams, Tsamaya and Outoilet). These photos were likely to result in hurtful comments from others. The following quotes indicate participants' experiences of photos of them being circulated via electronic media:

*“People were taking photos and showing them on Facebook. After the photos then the messages started saying that they didn’t know that I was a wild girl and I would do such things. ... they wrote on Stelemams people should call me for a good time because I am a wild girl and I like to party.”* (Participant 5)

*“They took a photo of me while I was sleeping and they pulled my nightie up and took photos of me and put it on Facebook so that everyone could see.”* (Participant 6)

Cyberbullying can include teasing, name calling, hurtful stories, embarrassing pictures or videos, threats of violence or death and any other harmful actions (Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:1). The most common form of relational bullying among adolescents is gossip and the spreading of rumours (Naruskov et al., 2012:326; Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:283), which was also experienced by the participants in the study. Electronic media enable users to abuse their freedom of speech, and this can end in devastating consequences as users tend to write anything that they desire, as was also evident from the responses of the participants. Often what is written on these websites is merely gossip, rumours, and for the most part, is untrue (Westfall, Triggs & Grossman, 2008:107). The spreading of harmful and mostly untrue messages, leads to the question of why people engage in cyberbullying.

### **Theme 3: Reasons for cyberbullying**

The participants raised their opinions on the reasons why people would engage in cyberbullying. They highlighted a number of reasons they believed could lead a person to engage in cyberbullying, referring to jealousy, the role of anonymity, gossiping and the personal background of the bully.

#### **Sub-theme 3.1: Jealousy as a reason for cyberbullying**

Most of the participants stated that jealousy was the main reason which in their opinion led a person to bully others. They identified various possible causes of jealousy, with most of them deciding that jealousy was due to the perceived popularity of the victim. There were also participants who were of the opinion that the bullying occurred as an attempt by the bully to feel better about the self by making others feel bad about themselves. One participant explained this situation as follows:

*“... people bully to feel good about themselves, to feel that they have that power, knowing that people are afraid of you.” (Participant 10)*

It is acknowledged in the literature that some bullies have a need to feel powerful and exert their power over others. They do this for various reasons such as feeling better about the self, and as a means of getting what they want (Van der Valk, 2014:40). The bully may also feel insecure, have poor self-confidence and self-esteem, or have psychological problems. They may as a result revert to bullying when they observe someone who has the qualities that they desire, or on the other hand, if they identify a weaker person that they may find an easy target to be bullied (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:182). The anonymity of electronic media was another reason for cyberbullying that was identified by the participants.

#### **Sub-theme 3.2: The role of anonymity in electronic media**

Participants who voiced their opinion on the reasons why people engage in cyberbullying, also referred to the protection provided by the anonymity that was

possible in electronic media. One participant explained the torture that was experienced as she received multiple text messages a result of gossip that was anonymously distributed through electronic media:

*“... a lot of people started inviting me on WhatsApp to ask me for the link to my [supposed] sex tape but I couldn’t see who they were because they didn’t use a photo of themselves as their profile picture, it was like pictures of cars or flowers or skulls so I couldn’t recognise anyone. So I don’t know who started sending my cell phone number around.” (Participant 2)*

Another participant experienced a similar situation and received multiple messages from unknown persons with no identifying profiles or numbers. These messages contained insults and threats. These participants experienced what is known as “text wars” which occurs when there is a group of people who repeatedly send offensive text messages to a victim in an attempt to harass the victim (Trolley & Hanel, 2010:39)

The role of anonymity in cyberbullying is confirmed by Van der Valk (2014:42) who states that “... phones and computer screens lead many people to behave in ways that they would not in person.” The anonymity allows for a loss of moral considerations and a loss of a filter in expressing opinions and feelings (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Bauman & Newman, 2013:28; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141). Some users will create false names or false profiles to protect their anonymity.

Participants explained that on social networking sites, for example Outoilet and Stelemams, users often do not make use of their real names but will choose a false name for themselves, which would enable them to say anything they please because their identity was protected. On social networking sites where the user’s name is visible, such as on Facebook, people might create false identities online and harass others by using these false profiles. Cyberbullies, who made use of their real names, when confronted, might deny that they were the ones who wrote the content. It would thus be difficult to ascertain whether users made use of their real or false names, or whether a perpetrator used the name of another user in an attempt to cause relational damage.

The creation of false identities in electronic media is described in literature. People find safety in creating false online identities for themselves because then they are in control of what they expose of themselves and they can portray themselves in any way that they choose (Hongladarom, 2011:533; Scruton, 2010:52; Welrave & Heirman, 2011:62). The online world and false identities would allow adolescents to express opinions and emotions that they may feel that they need to keep hidden in the real world (DeHaan et al., 2013:422; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141).

### **Sub-theme 3.3: Gossiping as a reason for cyberbullying**

Some participants were of the opinion that gossiping was one of the main reasons for people engaging in cyberbullying. Participants explained that many people thrived on gossip, and that the perpetrators of cyberbullying were able to express their thoughts and feelings with no hesitation due to the anonymity of online bullying. One participant explained why she believed that gossip is the main reason behind cyberbullying, as follows:

*“People like to gossip and write things on Stelemams. It’s a problem because people like to read it too. So if you write the truth on there it would be boring. Those people are trying to entertain the people that like to go read.”* (Participant 3)

This participant captured the role of both the cyberbully and the reader of the message in encouraging gossip in electronic media. The role of gossip seems to be especially relevant during the adolescent years. Adolescents are well known for starting rumours and spreading gossip in an attempt to alleviate boredom and create excitement (Kalman, 2013:90; Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:183). Adolescents do not think of the consequences when spreading rumours and gossip because it is too easy to hide behind an online identity or to just deny that they were involved (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:185). Not thinking about the potential consequences of behaviour could be related to the phenomenon of the personal fable related to cognitive development in the adolescent developmental phase (Berk, 2013:255; Schwartz et al., 2008:441).

### **Sub-theme 3.4: Personal circumstances as a cause of cyberbullying**

Some participants mentioned the role that adverse personal circumstances could play as a contributing factor to engaging in cyberbullying. Participants highlighted the role of these circumstances in the following quotes:

*“I think a lot of them thought that they are going to feel more superior. Maybe their home situation is not very nice and they have all this anger about ... then they ... bully ... to feel better. I think it has a lot to do with how you are raised, family problems and if you are not feeling good about yourself and want to make someone feel bad so you can feel better.”* (Participant 9)

*“People bully to feel better about themselves and the things that they are going through.”* (Participant 10)

Research has shown that there are various reasons as to why a person chooses to bully others. These reasons could include, amongst others, a need to express one's frustrations and to feel better about oneself, or to show off or gain popularity (Howard, 2014; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:182; Van der Valk, 2014:39). Furthermore, bullying behaviours have been associated with adverse conditions such as poverty, performing poorly at school, a lack of social skills, lack of parental supervision at home, gang membership, peer pressure, involvement with drugs and alcohol, child abuse, family violence and the fact that bullying can be normalised (Timm & Eskell-Blokland, 2011:340).

The participants' responses further indicated that the phenomenon of cyberbullying appeared to be a direct cause of or contributing factor to traditional bullying.

### **Theme 4: Traditional bullying following on cyberbullying**

From the responses of the participants, it became evident that the cyberbullying that they experienced did not occur in isolation. Once participants had been exposed to cyberbullying, there was further traditional bullying in the form of relational, physical and verbal bullying. One of the reasons for this was seen to be the fact that the potential audience for cyberbullying was unlimited, allowing the victim to become

well known at school and the focus of many peoples' attention. This situation is illustrated by the following quotes:

*'I think the [cyberbullying] incident made things worse for me because they only used to tease me now and then. But after the cyberbullying people knew me because I was live in front of everyone ... After that it was worse.'* (Participant 9)

*"When people read about you on Stelemams, then they think they know you so they come find you at school and carry on being ugly to you."* (Participant 5)

It is a consistent finding in cyberbullying studies that there is a significant overlap between experiences of cyberbullying and traditional bullying (Cassim, 2013:6; Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2009:205; Menesini, Nocentini & Camodeca, 2011:2; Naruskov et al., 2012:324; Sticca, Ruggier, Alsaker & Perren, 2013:54). In the present study, it was found that cyberbullying was perpetuated through all three forms of traditional bullying, namely physical, verbal and relational bullying, as described in Chapter 2 of the study. The findings indicated that as many as eight out of the ten participants experienced all three types of traditional bullying after their exposure to cyberbullying.

#### **Sub-theme 4.1: Relational bullying**

In adolescence, relational bullying is often aimed at damaging a person's self-esteem and lowering his or her chances of being accepted within the peer group (Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:43). Some participants in the present study found that their exposure to cyberbullying extended into relational bullying.

One participant, whose sister was also a victim of cyberbullying, reported on numerous episodes of relational bullying of her sister resulting from cyberbullying. She described how the girls at her school would continually gossip, spread rumours around the school and give her sister "dirty looks" whenever they would see her. Furthermore, an embarrassing picture of her sister was printed and put up around the school for all the learners to see, while the bullies would also try to get her sister

into trouble at school by telling teachers that she had cheated on a test or by stealing her sister's school books.

Another participant recalled how many people from her school would confront her during the day asking her for the link to the supposed "sex tape" that she had created, that they had read about in text messages via electronic media. Three other participants remembered how uncomfortable they felt every day at school due to other girls continuously giving them "dirty looks" and laughing at them after having read harmful messages about them via social networking sites.

A participant also explained that once information was available for all to see on social networking sites, it began a vicious cycle from cyberbullying to traditional bullying and back to cyberbullying. The participant described it as follows:

*"They also went to people talking about me and speaking all kinds of nonsense and you know how the gossip spreads ... then they all talk about it on Stelemams and on Facebook and even BBM. People would come to me and tell me what people were saying to each other and what they were writing online." (Participant 3)*

As is evident from the above responses, relational bullying took on many forms. Relational bullying can include manipulation, controlling, belittling, as well as demanding, rejecting and exclusionary behaviours and may be verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect (James, Flynn, Lawlor, Courtney, Murphy & Henry, 2011:441). The mentioned authors regard relational bullying as an increasing problem among adolescents and a phenomenon that may be transferred into the workplace and in romantic relationships in later life. Another form of traditional bullying that followed on cyberbullying was physical bullying.

#### **Sub-theme 4.2: Physical bullying**

A number of participants stated that there was an element of physical bullying after their exposure to cyberbullying. This form of bullying seemed to be a common occurrence, as half of the participants mentioned that they themselves, as well as people they knew had experienced being "pushed around" or "beaten up" by their

peers. Two participants also experienced the bullies taking their lunch from them at times.

The participants thus experienced direct forms of physical bullying, such as being physically harmed themselves, as well as more indirect forms of physical bullying, such as something taken from them. The literature supports the fact that physical bullying does not only involve the usual hitting, kicking, punching and pushing behaviours, but can also include behaviours such as blocking someone's path and not allowing them to pass, and breaking or stealing someone's belongings (Slonje & Smith, 2008:147; Smith, 2011:29; Twyman et al., 2010:195; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:34). Apart from physical bullying, cyberbullying also resulted in victims being subjected to verbal forms of bullying.

### **Sub-theme 4.3: Verbal bullying**

A number of the participants reported that the initial rumours about them that appeared on social networking sites and websites would lead to further name-calling and teasing at school. Three participants explained that they were constantly teased at school for any reason that the bullies could think of whether it was about the online content, their physical appearance, clothes, academic abilities or family. One participant described his experience in the following quote:

*“I was picked on because I was quite small and I was very quiet. I had big shoes and a big bag which looked funny to them I guess. Even though I did well at rugby at school they still teased me.” (Participant 9)*

Another three participants experienced receiving messages filled with threats. These messages would often contain empty threats of being assaulted, or warnings that if they told anyone their lives would be made miserable. For one participant the threats were not empty. Upon rejecting the advances of a fellow classmate, she was told that “he would show her.” He spread rumours of their apparent sexual activities to other learners in the class, who in turn began to tease her about all the things she had apparently “done” with the perpetrator. She explained her embarrassment:

*“He sent messages to our whole class telling them that he had sex with me and I am a wild girl and now I am denying it. But none of it was true. I was so embarrassed.” (Participant 5)*

In this study, verbal bullying was a common form of bullying that resulted from the participants' exposure to cyberbullying. In other studies it was also found that verbal bullying was the most common type of bullying on school grounds and involved the use of words to attack and threaten the victim, such as teasing, name-calling, insults, extortion and threats (Dempsey et al., 2009:962; Snakenborg et al., 2011:89; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:35).

### **Theme 5: The emotional effects of cyberbullying**

It has been proven in multiple studies that any type of bullying, whether it is traditional bullying or cyberbullying, can have serious long term effects on the victims (Goff, 2011:177; Slovak & Singer, 2011:6; Stauffer et al., 2012:354). Cyberbullying can greatly affect the self-esteem of a victim, and can cause devastating sadness, depression, anxiety, paranoia, and withdrawal, and these could result in a drop in school attendance and performance (Burnham et al., 2011:4; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:616; Prinsloo, 2008:30).

The findings of the study indicated that cyberbullying did have an effect on the self-esteem of the participants, and resulted in feelings of shame and fearfulness. In addition, emotional effects which were identified included anger and aggression, embarrassment, sadness, loss of trust, as well as paranoia.

#### **Sub-theme 5.1: The effect of cyberbullying on self-esteem**

The participants' responses with regard to the effect of cyberbullying on their self-esteem were divided. Half of the participants were overwhelmed by the cyberbullying that made them feel extremely bad about themselves. The other participants realised that the cyberbullying had the potential to lower their self-esteem; however they were aware of this possibility and consciously decided that they would not allow it to affect their views of the self.

Five out of the ten participants were deeply affected by the cyberbullying and described how it greatly affected their self-esteem and consequently their emotions. Participants described how hurtful the messages that were written about them on the Internet were and how these messages made them feel:

*“I didn’t like looking myself in the mirror, when I used to brush my teeth I just looked down at the sink. I never had any confidence.”* (Participant 9)

*“It made me feel very low. It just made me feel scared and very ashamed.”* (Participant 8)

*“I felt very bad about myself and I didn’t even want to be me. I wished that I could just die. I thought I must be a bad person for everyone to hate me.”* (Participant 6)

One participant, whose sister was also exposed to cyberbullying, recalled the total change in her sister during the period in which she was cyberbullied:

*“She started thinking that she was ugly, she started not dressing pretty. She didn’t like looking herself in the mirror anymore.”* (Participant 1)

Then there were five participants who did not allow the cyberbullying to affect their self-esteem. They described this as related to their initial positive self-esteem and the fact that they felt in control because they knew that the rumours created were untrue. Participants described their experiences as follows:

*“I don’t have a low self-esteem, it is just balanced. But when they were writing about me, I could see what they wanted to do. They wanted to make me feel bad about myself and worthless.”* (Participant 7)

*“It only hurt my feelings but it didn’t make me feel bad about myself because I knew it wasn’t true.”* (Participant 2)

Self-esteem is best understood as a the holistic evaluation of the overall worth that people feel about themselves and can include areas in their lives such as physical attractiveness and academic competence (Steiger, Allemand, Robins & Fend, 2014:325). The self-esteem of an adolescent can be very delicate and easily influenced by a number of factors (Sticca et al., 2013:55; Wild & Swartz, 2012:234).

Studies have proven that adolescents face the risk of lowering their self-esteem once becoming involved with social networking media because of the dangers of cyberbullying involved with such media (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2013:56). The findings of this study supported the risk mentioned by the above authors. It also indicated that adolescents could withstand the negative effects of cyberbullying on their self-esteem by means of a deliberate decision not to have the bullying affect their view of themselves.

### **Sub-theme 5.2: Anger and aggression**

A number of participants indicated that they struggled with anger as a result of being cyberbullied. For some participants, the anger manifested as aggressive behaviour. One participant stated that whenever he thought about the situation that he believed the bullies were putting him in, he would become extremely angry and aggressive towards others. The following quotes illustrate the anger and aggression participants experienced:

*“Your personality changes, your traits change. You become an aggressive person even though you don’t really know yourself like that.”*  
(Participant 7)

*“I was very, very, very aggressive. ... I had no one to talk to. They [the family] were there, I just didn’t feel like I could talk to them. Also, anything could make me angry. My sister’s bird was chirping the whole time and I just took it out the cage and I killed it. I didn’t tell them I killed the bird I just said a cat did. I was filled with a lot of anger ...”*  
(Participant 9)

It transpired that for some participants the level of cyberbullying became so intense, that they retaliated by physically attacking the people that they suspected having written about them and their families on various websites.

It is recognised that the victims, as also perpetrators of bullying, are at risk of experiencing symptoms of anger and aggression (Bradshaw, Waasdorp & O’Bennan, 2013:847). Even though some participants in this study expressed their anger in physical ways, literature indicates that a person can also express anger through withdrawal and ignoring others (James et al., 2011:440).

### Sub-theme 5.3: Embarrassment

Withdrawal from others could be a result of the embarrassment experienced by victims of cyberbullying. The participants indicated that the content of the information used to cyberbully them involved embarrassing stories, photos and videos of the participant, which left them feeling exposed, humiliated, embarrassed and ashamed.

Two participants in particular experienced humiliation and embarrassment when photo and video images of them were distributed via electronic media. They described the incidents as follows:

*“They took a photo of me while I was sleeping ... and put it on Facebook. ...Then they just sent it to everyone on their phones and everyone had seen me naked so I felt very embarrassed.”* (Participant 6)

*“I can’t believe that people would actually video record something [the participant becoming sick and vomiting] and then send it viral, upload it or even post it on your Facebook. Then they will send it to other people and then those people will send it to more people and it would spread and everyone would know about it.”* (Participant 9)

A major factor which contributed to embarrassment was that the content being used for cyberbullying could reach an unlimited number of people and, once the content was distributed via electronic media, it would be inerasable. As explained by Van der Valk (2014:42), “anything communicated digitally is infinitely replicable and impossible to delete. No one can truly ‘take back’ anything posted to the Internet.”

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying can be an extremely humiliating experience for adolescents because of the exposure that they face (James et al., 2011:448). In the present study, all of the participants mentioned their embarrassment at the fact that “everyone could see” the information, photos or videos about them that were distributed by means of electronic media.

#### **Sub-theme 5.4: Experience of sadness**

Almost all of the participants expressed sadness regarding their cyberbullying experience. They indicated that they felt completely alone and desperately sad or even depressed. Some of the participants stated that they would cry a lot during the cyberbullying events. Their sadness was also related to a sense of being alone and not belonging anywhere. One participant stated:

*“I felt lonely for days and I was very emotional, I also felt very sad. I felt alone, like nobody wants me near.”* (Participant 5)

The experiences of the participants are supported by literature indicating that sadness and depression in adolescence is strongly associated with bullying (Santiago-Menendez & Campbell, 2013:407; Wild & Swartz, 2012:190). Both the bully and the victim experience episodes of sadness, however, many studies report that the victim reports more sadness than the bully (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005:191; Steiger et al., 2014:329).

#### **Sub-theme 5.5: Feelings of paranoia**

Many of the participants' experiences with cyberbullying left them feeling so exposed that they became paranoid, and began thinking that everyone knew about their alleged or real personal experiences which were being shared online. All of the participants explained that they were constantly monitoring their mobile phones, Facebook and websites such as Stelemams, Tsamaya and Outoilet to see what people were writing about them. One participant explained:

*“You start to feel everyone is talking about you. You even think people are talking about you when they are not talking about you. You see someone laughing far away and you start wondering if they are laughing at you. Or you see someone showing someone else something on a phone and you think it is also about you. You start checking Facebook and Twitter and Outoilet hundreds of times a day constantly wondering who wrote what about you. Even checking your phone in class and then being in trouble for having your phone on. The phone gets taken and you must ask your parents to pay the fine to get your phone back. More anxiety when you don't have a phone.”* (Participant 7)

One participant remembered how her feelings of paranoia started with curiosity to see what people were writing about her and she believed that it was not bothering her. However, as time progressed she saw how she would constantly monitor the website to see what people were writing.

A major factor that contributed to feelings of paranoia was the fact that the participants were never without their mobile phones. Many participants commented on the fact that there was no escape from the cyberbullying because there was always access to mobile phones and computers. One participant remembered how obsessed she became with monitoring her phone that it made her “want to smash” her phone. Ironically, it seems that the feelings of paranoia resulting from cyberbullying could contribute to an increased involvement with electronic media, thereby escalating the experience of “no escape” from the bullying.

The participants’ experiences of “no escape” are reflected in literature that points out that, since cyberbullying takes place through electronic media such as mobile phones or computers, there is hardly any escape from this type of bullying. Adolescents are very familiar with the use of technology and are rarely seen without their mobile phones. They make multiple visits a day to social networking sites and other interactive websites (Bauman & Newman, 2013:28; Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2013:56; Cart, 2010:34; Dempsey et al., 2009:963; Slonje & Smith, 2008:151). The exposure to cyberbullying further results in a loss of trust in others.

#### **Sub-theme 5.6: Loss of trust in others**

It was evident that some participants had lost all trust in other people, both in their friendship circles and in their families, due to cyberbullying. A participant explained how she struggled with developing trust in her friends because she found herself constantly wondering if what she said would land up on the Internet. One participant was exposed cyberbullying in the form of rumours about her father. She described how these rumours affected her and her sisters’ trust in their father, but also their trust in people in general:

*“It makes us as his daughters feel like we can’t trust our father. If our own father can’t be faithful to our mother, then which guy is going to be faithful to us? So it has a big impact on our trust issues, with all people, not only our partners.” (Participant 8)*

In line with the experiences of the participants, it has been found that continued exposure to bullying can have a devastating effect on the victim’s ability to trust others and their faith in humankind (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005:193; Menesini et al., 2011:9; Savı Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2409). Loss of trust in friends, families and “all people” indicates the systemic nature of cyberbullying, where its effects could affect different ecological systems of the individual (Berk, 2013:26).

Participants further indicated how the cyberbullying had an effect on their behaviours. These behaviours were often their attempts to cope with the cyberbullying and are discussed in the following theme.

## **Theme 6: Behavioural effects of cyberbullying**

Participants described a number of ways that they tried to cope with the cyberbullying. Their coping strategies manifested in certain behaviours, which were mostly withdrawal, retaliation and revenge, self-harm and suicide attempts; indicating the serious nature of cyberbullying.

### **Sub-theme 6.1: Withdrawal from others**

Most of the participants explained that they decided to withdraw themselves from many areas in their life such as friends, family, sports activities, school and social events. A few participants explained the inner conflict that resulted from this decision to withdraw: on the one hand, they had the desire to be alone, while on the other hand they experienced feeling incredibly lonely. The following illustrate their experiences of withdrawal:

*“I was quiet at home. They [the family] wondered if something was wrong. I never used to talk to anyone or anything so I would just keep it in. I would never eat. I never did my homework and I stopped studying. I never used to watch TV. I would just be in my room.” (Participant 9)*

*“I decided to withdraw from certain people, actually everyone.”*  
(Participant 8)

Many victims of bullying and cyberbullying begin to withdraw from the life that they once knew. Victims may choose to distance themselves from friendships, family relationships, romantic relationships, sports and extra mural activities and school work. It is often this withdrawal that gets the attention of parents and educators that leads to the realisation that something is wrong with the victim (Bradshaw et al., 2013:840; Champion, 2009:73; Menesini et al., 2011:5; Prinsloo, 2008:34).

### **Sub-theme 6.2: Retaliation and revenge**

A few participants decided that they were going to stand up for themselves and take revenge against the bully. Unfortunately, in all cases of retaliation and revenge the outcome was negative. Participants explained how their attempts to retaliate and take revenge often resulted in them having guilt feelings due to the fact that these behaviours did not fit with their self-concept. Apart from these attempts to retaliate, none of the participants were otherwise engaged as perpetrators of cyberbullying. The quotes by participants highlight their internal struggles of guilt and remorse following attempts to retaliate and take revenge:

*“... I went onto Stelemams and I wrote all the secrets of all the friends that hurt me and I felt good because I hoped that they would feel the same pain as me. But now I just feel bad because even though they can't see it was me I think they know it was me because of everything I wrote about them. But I am glad they got to feel how I felt. But I am sorry about it now.”* (Participant 6)

*“I felt good to stand up for myself but bad to know that I hurt people. But then I would think, people hurt me and they don't care so I don't care either. Then feel good. Then feel bad because I knew I didn't really want to be like that.”* (Participant 7)

*“I beat the girl up and at that time it felt nice like I was in control. ... I thought it would scare them [other people] into not talking about me. But I guess it didn't, it just made things worse. Then people wrote about me hitting the girl and wrote that I am a bully because I just hit another girl and she did nothing wrong.”* (Participant 10)

As was found in the present study, victims may choose to retaliate in order to feel that they are standing up for themselves or in an attempt to get back at the bullies who have hurt them (James et al., 2011:441; Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:293; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:184; Zimmer-Gembeck, Lees & Skinner, 2011:133). However, retaliation is very rarely met with a positive response and often only makes the cyberbullying and traditional bullying situations worse (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005:193; Champion, 2009:80; Kalman, 2013:82).

Retaliation and revenge could further contribute to peer violence, as indicated by Prinsloo (2008:32): “The motive of retaliation is equally worrisome because aggressive thoughts lead to aggression-biased interpretations and an aggressive escalatory spiral that reinforces the reciprocal nature of peer violence.” Where some participants attempted to retaliate against others, other participants turned their emotions onto themselves, which resulted in behaviours related to self-harm and suicide.

### **Sub-theme 6.3: Self-harm and suicide attempts**

The participants in this study described various behaviours that were indicative of self-harm. These behaviours included cutting oneself, eating disorders, risk-taking behaviour, and suicide attempts by overdosing on medication and cutting their wrists.

Two participants explained that, since being exposed to cyberbullying, they would cut themselves in order to feel physical pain to counteract the emotional pain caused by the bullying. One participant described how she felt:

*“I would cut myself on my legs so that no one could see but now I can see it every day.” (Participant 6)*

Self-harm is prevalent in adolescence. It is done without verbal expression in an attempt to find relief from emotional pain. Most adolescents who self-harm do not seek help, and for this reason it needs to be taken seriously (Cart, 2010:33;

Klineberg, Kelly, Stansfeld & Bhui, 2013:4; Phillips, Spears, Montgomery, Millings, Sayal & Stallard, 2013:2).

Another participant was suffering with an eating disorder after a video of the participant vomiting in front of a large group of strangers and learners from the school was distributed via electronic media. This participant explained:

*“So I never even used to eat after that because I’m scared now if I eat something, am I going to throw up now? Those people gave me that fear of throwing up. I was almost anorexic because I never ate anything.”* (Participant 9)

A participant explained how she would engage in risky behaviour because she was unsure how to handle all the emotions, sadness and suicidal thoughts she was experiencing due to the cyberbullying:

*“I wished I could die. I wished someone would kill me so I went to walk late at night on the street. I snuck out of the house hoping someone would kidnap me and I could die but I was too scared so I went back home.”* (Participant 6)

One participant shared the pain of losing a friend to a drug overdose after he started using drugs as a coping strategy to deal with cyberbullying. The participant explained it as follows:

*“My friend got a girl pregnant so then people were writing in Facebook that he has got lots of girls pregnant. ... the people tease him at school and say he must stop by and pick up all his children ... he must come own up for all the children he has. He changed so much and he got very depressed and he became involved with drugs and one day he took too many and he died.”* (Participant 5)

The literature points to a direct link between bullying and substance use. Adolescents who are being bullied often turn to illegal substances to ease their emotional pain and use this escape as a way to cope with the bullying that they experience (Cassim, 2013:3; Saví Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2407; Van der Valk, 2014:41; Wild & Swartz, 2012:187).

Other participants seemed so desperate in the face of cyberbullying that they seriously considered suicide as an option. This finding is alarming when one considers that, of the ten participants who were interviewed, three experienced suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, these three participants had all attempted suicide at some stage during their cyberbullying experiences. One out of the three cases was so severe that the participant was admitted to hospital after taking an overdose of medication.

Another two participants experienced the suicide of a friend and a sister respectively; both as a result of cyberbullying. They related these experiences as follows:

*“They were writing that he was gay because he liked sitting with girls ... The kids would beat him up after school. They would also tease him at school. So ... he was scared to walk home if they beat him up and then they would send him messages and write on Stelemams. Then he committed suicide.”* (Participant 3)

*“That afternoon ... my older sister said she heard something like a loud crash. She saw my sister ... she started screaming for my mom and my mom came running with my brother and they went in and they saw how my sister was hanging. ... I could see that heart sore in their faces. ... And it felt so sore, even now it still feels so sore, like no one knows how I feel. They think I am fine like all the pain is gone.”* (Participant 1)

The attempts of three participants to commit suicide and the incidents where someone close to two other participants committed suicide, illustrate how cyberbullying and traditional bullying can become so severe for a victim that he or she sees no way out and opts for suicide (Badenhorst, 2011:3; Burnham et al., 2011:7; Cart, 2010:34; Prinsloo, 2008:32; Saví Çakara & Karataş, 2012:2409; Slovak & Singer, 2011:11; Stauffer et al., 2012:355). Bullying and cyberbullying related suicides continue to occur as there is not enough being done to educate children and adolescents on the seriousness and long lasting effects of bullying and cyberbullying (Kalman, 2013:73; Phillips et al., 2013:2).

## Theme 7: The social effects of cyberbullying

During the phase of adolescence, the peer group becomes increasingly important (Cho & Hung, 2012:527; Kingery et al., 2011:217) and relationships with friends therefore play a significant role in the life of the adolescent. The findings of the study indicated that cyberbullying greatly influenced the friendships of the participants. The following sub-themes were identified with regard to the influence of cyberbullying on the participants' friendships: withdrawal from friends, loss of friends due to the cyberbullying and rumours, friends as the perpetrators of cyberbullying, friends who remained true and the effect of cyberbullying on participants' social life.

### Sub-theme 7.1: Withdrawal from friends

Half of the participants in the study indicated that cyberbullying resulted in them withdrawing from their friends. They explained that they decided for themselves that they would rather distance themselves from their friends than maintain the relationships. There were various reasons for this decision. Some participants felt that their friends did not understand their situation of being bullied, while some participants felt that they weren't sure if they could really trust their friends anymore. Their distrust of their friends is clear in the following quotes by the participants:

*"The [cyberbullying] experience made me very defensive. If someone would comment anything I would wonder if they are being sarcastic or do they genuinely mean it as a compliment or were they just trying to make me embarrassed. So then you don't even want friends around you. You just want to be alone. You give them the cold shoulder just so that they will leave you alone." (Participant 7)*

*"I don't really want friends because they let you down. I am also not willing to spend time with new people. I sit alone at break and that is better for me. There are times when I miss not having a friend but I still choose not to have any. I don't want friends in my life. They are just trouble." (Participant 2)*

*"Friends don't always have good intentions. They might just want to know the juicy details of the story but they don't really want to support you." (Participant 8)*

At times, victims may feel unsure whether or not they can trust their friends and rather than taking the risk, they choose to withdraw from their friendships (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:293; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:178). This situation was confirmed by the participants. Participants also indicated that they had lost friends because of rumours that were spread as part of cyberbullying.

### **Sub-theme 7.2: Loss of friends due to cyberbullying**

Most of the participants indicated that they had lost friends because their friends chose to believe the rumours and gossip that was spread via electronic media and began to distance themselves from the participants. One participant described how she lost many friends who didn't want to be seen with her because of rumours that she was pregnant and another participant recalled how she watched friend after friend turn their backs on her when she needed them the most. The emotional impact of such an experience was described by a participant in the following quote:

*"I only had one friend left, the rest believed the stories. So I only had one friend left after I felt like I had lots of friends before. That was not nice, but I was grateful for my one friend. She saved my life."*  
(Participant 6)

Victims of cyberbullying may turn to their friends for support. If the friends have not experienced bullying themselves or underestimate the serious effect it has on the victim, the victims may not receive the support that they require and it could lead to the end of the friendship (Slonje & Smith, 2007:149). For adolescents, the loss of friendships can lead them to feel that their entire world is falling apart due to the extreme importance that they place on their friends and peers (James et al., 2011:441; Wild & Swartz, 2012:239). The loss of a friend could even be more harrowing if the friend is a perpetrator of bullying.

### **Sub-theme 7.3: Friends as perpetrators of bullying**

A theme which emerged during interviews was the fact that a number of participants experienced cyberbullying from people that they considered to be their friends.

Participants described the shock at being let down by a best friend and the disappointment of being betrayed by friends, as indicated in the following quotes:

*“I had a best friend and I believe she is the one who started all the rumours because I used to talk to her about everything and she was the only one who knew certain details.”* (Participant 2)

*“On BBM it was people’s statuses saying that I am pregnant and that is what happens when you sleep around. Everyone could see their status. These are people I considered my friends.”* (Participant 8)

One participant explained how she felt trapped in certain friendships with girls in her class even though she knew that they were the ones writing on the website about her. She motivated why she would not be able to get out of the friendship, as follows:

*“I think it would then be worse because I think that they would write even worse things about me because they will know that I don’t like them and don’t want to be their friend. So we are still friends but I don’t trust them in the same way anymore. I don’t think they are good friends, but I don’t want to fight with anyone.”* (Participant 4)

The responses of the participants point out that the bully sometimes comes from within the victim’s social circle (Champion, 2009:75; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2013:62). As experienced by one of the participants in this study, many victims choose to remain friends with the bullies, even though they are aware that the relationship is unhealthy, because they are afraid of losing the friendship (James et al., 2011:441; Mishna, Wiener & Pepler, 2008:551).

#### **Sub-theme 7.4: Friends who remained true to the victim**

Most of the participants found that they were able to maintain friendships and have support from their friends during their exposure to cyberbullying and traditional bullying. In most cases, the friends who supported the participants during their cyberbullying experience, had themselves experienced bullying or cyberbullying and knew the pain that such exposure could bring. One participant described her situation as follows:

*“When my friends were starting to dislike me and didn’t want me to be their friend, I only had one friend who understood the person I am and knew the me inside. So I went to her and told her and she said that she will support me because something also happened to her.” (Participant 5)*

The value of having friends who are able to understand a victim, was explained by a participant. Even though he tried to push his friends away and distance himself from them, they still understood him as a person. He eventually felt comfortable enough to talk to them and confide in them regarding the cyberbullying that he was facing.

The findings of the study point to the value of healthy friendships that are filled with affection and support. Real friends would come to the rescue when needed and would provide comfort and support during hardships (Scruton, 2010:49; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011:180). Even friends may have arguments, however the nature of such arguments differ from bullying; as stated by Dube and De Wet (2012:65): “Friendly or playful teasing, as well as fighting or arguing between two or more people of about the same strength is not bullying.”

Participants indicated that the friends who supported them during their exposure to cyberbullying, were often victims of bullying themselves. This finding is supported by literature indicating that victims of bullying often experience that the friends that remain true to them are often friends who have also experienced cyberbullying or traditional bullying (Mishna et al., 2008:550). Such friends might be in a position to better understand the victim.

#### **Sub-theme 7.5: The effect of cyberbullying on participants’ social life**

The participants indicated that cyberbullying had a major influence on their social life. Nine out of ten participants confirmed that their cyberbullying experiences affected their social lives to such an extent that they began to distance themselves from the social activities that they were previously involved in. Most of the participants indicated that they withdrew from activities involving friends, family, sports activities, and social events. Only one participant stated that his social life was not affected at all and that in spite of the cyberbullying, he still spent time with friends. His response

emphasises the value of support from friends in preventing the victim from becoming socially isolated:

*“My social life was not really affected because many friends, even though I pushed them away, still knew the real me and I found myself still going out with those friends and it was also a less stressful environment than being at school.” (Participant 7)*

Withdrawal from social activities often stem from the effect of cyberbullying on the self-esteem of the victim. Some victims could be so badly affected by the bullying experience that they do not feel that they have the confidence or self-esteem to continue with sport and extra-curricular activities, and they may stop taking part in outings and activities with their friends (Phillips et al., 2013:4; Scruton, 2010:57; Steiger et al., 2014:338). Cyberbullying may also result in victims withdrawing from school and school activities.

### **Theme 8: The effect of cyberbullying on school attendance**

A number of participants indicated that their exposure to cyberbullying negatively affected their school attendance and their motivation to focus on their education. They expressed how being victims of cyberbullying made it difficult for them to enjoy school and attend school regularly. During 2013 and 2014, one of the participants had missed 111 school days. Participants explained their uneasiness with school as follows:

*“I hated school because of it [the bullying]. Even today still. I think ma’am knows, I don’t like school. I get very emotional and I get very angry when I get to school. It’s because of past experiences, how people were towards me. So I am angry. Most of the time when I get to school I am sad.” (Participant 9)*

*“I stayed in the house and I hated getting ready for school. I pretended to be sick many days and in the end I missed a lot of school and a lot of work and I failed the grade. That was a very bad day for me.” (Participant 6)*

It is common for victims of traditional bullying and cyberbullying to withdraw from school because school becomes a place where they do not feel safe. They develop

a negative attitude towards school and their academic work, with the result that their academic performance is negatively affected (Chigona & Chigona, 2008:51; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:141; Sticca et al., 2013:63; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:118).

One participant commented on the difficulties she experienced in the transition from primary school to secondary school, which were made much worse by the fact that she became a victim of cyberbullying. She experienced loneliness and exclusion during this time which was only made worse by the cyberbullying that she experienced. The transition from primary school to secondary school is difficult for many adolescents (Pellegrini, Long, Solberg, Roseth, Dupuis, Bohn & Hickey, 2010:203; Van der Valk, 2014:39; Wild & Swartz, 2012:189). Noteworthy is the fact that for adolescents who are predisposed to aggressive behaviours, changing schools may even be a factor that causes them to fall into the habit of bullying others (Van der Valk, 2014:42).

Based on the responses of the participants, it seems that the school system played an important role in the handling of bullying among learners. Half of the participants in this study experienced positive intervention and assistance from their school principal and educators. Their responses indicated that a low tolerance of bullying within the school context provided a sense of support to learners, as indicated in the following responses:

*“Our school does not take bullying lightly.”* (Participant 4)

*“The principal warned us that there will be trouble if we [the grade 12 learners] pick on the grade eights.”* (Participant 9)

Unfortunately support from the school system was not always the case, as one participant recalled how her mother was turned away by a principal (not of the school used in this study) when she requested assistance from him in dealing with her child being a victim of bullying at the school:

*“My mom went to see the principal to ask him to do something about the bullying but he said he can’t do anything about it and it was not his problem ... my mom should sort it out herself, and not at his school.”*  
(Participant 1)

During this time, the above participant's sister also reported her bullying experiences to the principal, but was also turned away by him. The sister later committed suicide because of the bullying. The participant had the following comment about the reaction of the school principal:

*"I don't think he really believed her and how serious it was and how often it was going on."* (Participant 1)

All learners and educators have the right to a safe environment at school which includes a healthy learning environment and no risk of physical or psychological harm (Prinsloo, 2008:27). Therefore, schools have a responsibility in the prevention of school violence and bullying. The education system needs to incorporate policies on awareness, education, understanding, prevention and intervention of all forms of bullying (Champion, 2009:81; Trolley & Hanel, 2010:95). Additionally, there needs to be education about the conditions that compel adolescents to engage in bullying (Van der Valk, 2014:39).

The effect of cyberbullying on participants' school attendance is a clear example of systemic effect thereof. Due to the interrelatedness of electronic media as a system with other systems (O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801), the effect of cyberbullying did spread to the participants' school system. Another ecological system affected by the cyberbullying, was the participants' family system.

### **Theme 9: The effect of cyberbullying on the family**

A noteworthy finding was that nine of the ten participants initially did not tell their parents about their exposure to cyberbullying, but rather wanted to keep it a secret from the parents. When participants did eventually tell their parents about the cyberbullying, it seemed that the responses from their parents had a marked influence on the participants. Some participants described how being victims of cyberbullying had a wider influence on the atmosphere in the home and on the general well-being of the family members. These aspects will be discussed as sub-themes in this section.

### Sub-theme 9.1: Failure to disclose cyberbullying to parents

Most of the participants did not tell their parents anything about the cyberbullying or the traditional bullying that they had experienced. The reasons for keeping it a secret stemmed from, amongst others, perceptions about cultural norms, feeling uncomfortable talking to parents, and fear of the parent's reaction, as illustrated by the following quotes:

*"In some cultures you are expected to stand up to your problems and face them, not running to others for help."* (Participant 7)

*"I don't feel comfortable talking to my mom. I would maybe mention a few things but I don't think I could open up the way I am talking to you now. It wouldn't really flow."* (Participant 9)

*"I didn't tell my mother because she was going to shout at me. She would think why out of all the people in the school or all the people in the community would people choose ... you? What are you doing that is wrong?"* (Participant 10)

Two participants' did disclose being victims of bullying after their parents had been informed about the cyberbullying by members of the community and subsequently confronted the participants about it. Four participants told their parents that they were exposed to cyberbullying after their parents noticed a drastic change in either their behaviour or academic performance at school.

Only one participant told her mother out of her own free will that she was being cyberbullied. Based on her mothers' reaction, the participant decided that she was not going to talk about the cyberbullying to her mother again. The participant explained:

*"I talk to her about everything, but not about the cyberbullying anymore. She will just tell me I must get over it and not worry about it. I try to make her understand but sometimes she says it is my own fault because they write about me and we are supposed to be friends."* (Participant 4)

The comment, indicating that her mother did not understand her experience of being a victim of cyberbullying, was echoed by the responses of four other participants.

Half of the participants thus felt that their parents did not understand how the cyberbullying affected them.

Victims of traditional bullying and cyberbullying often do not report their experiences to their parents for various reasons. Some victims believe that their parents would not understand them, as was found in the responses from the participants in this study, while others are afraid that their parents would want to intervene, thereby making the situation worse (Kalman, 2013:83; Mishna et al., 2008:557; Sharbaro & Smith, 2011:150; Slonje & Smith, 2008:153). Parents need to be encouraged to be involved in their children's lives, and need guidance on how to protect their children and how to respond in appropriate ways when their children are victims of bullying or cyberbullying (Badenhorst, 2011:17; Goff, 2011:180; James et al., 2011:451; Jones et al., 2013:67). The various responses of parents to the disclosure by their children as the victims of cyberbullying was an aspect that was identified as a theme from the information obtained from the participants.

### **Sub-theme 9.2: Parents' responses to disclosure of cyberbullying**

Participants indicated that, when they did disclose being a victim of cyberbullying, their parents' response to the news was mainly positive and encouraging. However, there was an element of normalising bullying behaviour in the responses of parents or care-givers. A participant, for example, explained that once she had confided in her grandmother, the grandmother told her not to worry because the next week there would be rumours about someone else and people would forget about her. Similar ways of responding by parents were mentioned by other participants, as evident in the following quotes:

*"She said I must just not worry and I must get over it. There is nothing else I can do. There will always be people who try to knock you down but you must stand proud and know yourself better than what the rumours say. She said friends are like that, they can be ugly and talk about each other."* (Participant 4)

*"They just told me not to worry because people are going to talk and we know the truth so we don't have to prove to anybody what the truth is."* (Participant 8)

There is a fine line between parents being supportive of their children's situation, and falling into the trap of normalising bullying and cyberbullying as if it is something that all adolescents have to experience at some stage in their lives. Bullying behaviours and experiences should not be normalised (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:123; Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt & Arseneault, 2010:810; Chaux et al., 2009:520; Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Hymel et al., 2010:101; Stauffer et al., 2012:353; Urbanski & Permuth, 2009:5) and victims of bullying should feel understood and supported.

However, some participants experienced negative reactions from their parents when they disclosed being victims of bullying. They experienced their parents as being angry with them and not having any trust in them. One participant stated that her mother did not trust her anymore and that the rumours spread by means of cyberbullying have ruined their once close relationship. Another participant recalled:

*“She was cross and she didn't trust me. Even now when she says that she trusts me, I can see that she doesn't.” (Participant 5)*

Parents might respond in a negative way to their children upon finding out about a child being a victim of bullying or cyberbullying, as they are not always sure what to believe or how to handle the situation. The response from the parents makes the bullying experience even worse for the victims (Champion, 2009:75; Kalman, 2013:83), as was experienced by the participants in this study.

On the contrary, a number of participants reported that their parents did want to intervene and report the cyberbullying to the school or the principal but participants often convinced their parents that this would be a bad idea. The reluctance to have their parents report the matter was mostly based on their fears that the bullying would only intensify if they took that approach. One of the participants opted to leave her school and attend a different school, rather than her mother report the bullying to the school authorities.

Adolescents have an intense fear that if they report the bullying, the bully would want to retaliate and, as a result, the bullying would intensify. Therefore, victims of

bullying and cyberbullying often struggle with their situation alone (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Lindfors et al., 2012:2). Although the parents of most of the participants initially did not know about the participant being the victim of cyberbullying, the effects of the bullying on the participants did have a rippling effect on the atmosphere in the home.

### **Sub-theme 9.3: The effect of cyberbullying on the home atmosphere**

Half of the participants reported that the cyberbullying resulted in a negative atmosphere at home. These effects were due to changes in the participants' behaviour due to the cyberbullying, as well as the family's reactions to the rumours being spread about the participants, and were worsened by other incidences in the home. One participant recalled how greatly his behaviour affected the home atmosphere:

*“The family could see that there was something wrong. They wanted to send me to a psychiatrist but I didn't want to go. They took me to a doctor and he said that it was just puberty but I was in grade four and even I knew that it was not puberty. But then I just distanced myself from everyone. It was bad because I would bring everyone else's mood down to my mood. I was rude and disrespectful. It was not very nice being at home.”* (Participant 9)

The family members of another participant became distressed by the rumours spread by means of the cyberbullying. This situation caused such a negative and unbearable atmosphere in the home that her siblings, who lived in other provinces, had to be called to the family home to attempt to ease the tension.

One of the participants remembered that there was a lot of tension in the home and that everyone could feel that there was something that was “not right” in the life of her sister, who was a victim of cyberbullying. The situation worsened after her sister committed suicide. The participant described the home atmosphere as “mixed up” due to the tension and uncertainty in the house. Two years have passed since her sister passed away but the participant experienced that the tension has not changed. Holidays and specific events would be particularly difficult, which the participant described as follows:

*“My mom cries a lot, especially like Valentine’s day, New Year’s Day, Christmas Day and her birthday.” (Participant 1)*

During the period that another participant was being cyberbullied, her adolescent sister had fallen pregnant and this had caused a lot of tension in the home. Cyberbullies started a rumour that the participant was also pregnant. This rumour caused more tension, distrust and disappointment in the home.

Often there is a negative atmosphere in the homes of bullies and victims of bullying, due to the range of emotions that both experience. Parents are often not aware of their children’s experiences; therefore they do not understand their “moods”, emotions and withdrawal (Agosto et al., 2012:39; Flashpohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink & Birchmeie, 2009:639; Rigby, 2010:16; Shaw & Cross, 2012:142). The fact that parents are unaware of children being victims of bullying, can be related to the findings of the study, namely that most of the participants chose not to inform their parents that they were victims of cyberbullying. From the study, it transpires that cyberbullying also directly affected other members of the family.

#### **Sub-theme 9.4: The effect on the family as a whole**

The findings of the study suggest that cyberbullying could have severe consequences on the functioning of the family as a whole. True to ecological systems theory (Berk, 2013:29), the responses of some of the participants proved how cyberbullying of a child in the family could affect the dynamics and relationships of the whole family.

One of the participants and her sister were both victims of cyberbullying. This participant and her family have been greatly affected by the suicide of her sister due to cyberbullying. Participant one believed that since her sister passed away, her mother and father would fight more often, her brother had become “more naughty”, she herself was left feeling totally alone, while her mother attempted suicide as she was unable to deal with the loss of her daughter. As a result, the participant has taken on the role of care-giver for the family, often cooking for the family or intervening when her brother is being bullied by her father or when their parents

have arguments. The way in which the sister's suicide affected the whole family, is evident in the participant's description:

*"We try not to talk about my sister but sometimes it just comes out. Then I just go out of the room so it doesn't cause a fight. ... When people ask my parents how they are doing since my sister passed away they will say things like 'there is nothing to live for anymore'. Then they will compare us to my sister. When I cook, my mom will say to me that I don't cook as nice as my sister did, or when I make tea for my dad, he will drink it but he will say your sister used to make the best tea. Or when I blow [dry] my hair, my dad would say it looks wild and it doesn't look nice, your sister's hair was better than yours."* (Participant 1)

As is evident from the above situation, suicide can have devastating effects on the family members that are left behind. When it is a suicide due to bullying, it can be even more difficult to accept the loss of the victim due to feelings that the suicide could have been prevented (Adams, 2010:44; Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Burnham et al., 2011:7; Hamilton & Rolf, 2010:287).

One participant believed that the cyberbullying experience had ruined her relationship with her mother. She believed that her mother no longer trusted her and that she could not talk to her mother about anything because her mother would be too worried about her. However, she did believe that the cyberbullying experience brought her closer to her sister and had improved their relationship.

Another participant and her family struggled with the rumours of her father's extramarital affairs that were spread via electronic media in efforts to bully the participant. These rumours put the whole family under a great amount of stress, as described by the participant:

*"It has affected us in a very bad way, we can't even go to the mall without people looking at us and gossiping about us behind our backs. It hurts because we all live in the same house and my dad does not do anything to put us at ease."* (Participant 8)

The experience of bullying and cyberbullying can have an extremely negative effect on the victim's family. Not only does the victim's behaviour and personality change drastically, but the exposure of a child to cyberbullying can cause tension that affects

the whole family (Alsaker et al., 2010:90; Bauman & Newman, 2013:27; Price & Dalglish, 2010:55; Urbanski & Permeth, 2009:55). The participants' responses highlight the various ways in which the victim's whole family could be affected by cyberbullying.

### **Theme 10: Cyberbullying as a hidden phenomenon**

From the interviews with the participants, it seemed that victims of cyberbullying were often not willing to tell others about it. The content of messages and images of cyberbullying can be viewed and shared by virtually limitless numbers of people (Adams, 2010:45; Naruskov et al., 2012:326), making it evident that this information is known to others. Despite the likelihood that many friends and fellow learners might thus be aware of the rumours and images being distributed about them, half of the participants experienced cyberbullying as being something that people do not want to talk about. One participant described the situation as follows:

*"I think people keep quiet about that. It's embarrassing. How can you go and tell someone you have been cyberbullied? It's like a joke, no one even believes that people can be cyberbullied."* (Participant 10)

One of the participants whose sister committed suicide as a result of being a victim of cyberbullying admitted that she never even knew that her sister was being cyberbullied until her mother told her about it, as her sister never spoke to anyone in the family about it. On the one occasion when the participant spoke to her sister about it, her sister downplayed the situation and told her that it was "just something that all children experience at some point in their lives" and it was "nothing serious." The participant believed that the cyberbullying remained hidden as no one thought it to be a serious matter. Once her sister had reached a point of desperation, she had approached the school about her experience but was turned away and she believed that she was not taken seriously.

A participant pointed to the fact that perpetrators of bullying often did not understand the seriousness of rumours and gossip that are being spread as part of

cyberbullying. This participant spoke of how girls in her class began to spread a very serious rumour about her and another boy:

*“They wrote that this boy in our class raped me and that he likes raping girls. If you know him then you will know that it is not true ... I told them that they are being stupid because that [rape] is a criminal offence. Now, they are not playing with someone’s emotions, they are playing with someone’s life, he could be arrested.”* (Participant 3)

The perpetrators of cyberbullying often do not have insight into the possible harm their actions can cause to the victims. The cyberbully may view his or her actions as providing entertainment to others, or being funny (Steffgen et al., 2011:643; Twyman et al., 2010:195). Due to the phenomenon of adolescent egocentrism, adolescents may not be able to differentiate their own thoughts from the thoughts of others (Artar, 2007:1215; Berk, 2013:255; Louw et al., 2007:306). The perpetrator may, for example, not realise that his or her thoughts of being funny or entertaining could be vastly different to the experiences of the victim, which might relate more to hurt and shame. Adolescents may thus not realise that the content of the rumours could destroy lives.

Cyberbullying is described as a hidden phenomenon (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615; Juvonen & Gross, 2008:497; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011:801). One of the reasons for this is that victims and others known to the victim are not always willing to come forward to an authority figure such as a parent, educator or other professional, while it may happen that adolescents are not even willing to talk to their friends about their cyberbullying experiences (Burnham et al., 2011:5; Cassim, 2013:2; Diamanduros et al., 2008:695; Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Menesini et al., 2011:11; Slonje & Smith, 2008:153).

It is evident that cyberbullying could have severe effects on the victims as well as on their relationships with friends and family. The hesitance of most of the participants to disclose being victims of cyberbullying could contribute to it being a hidden phenomenon and could deprive them of support by others. One of the questions asked to the participants in the study, was on their suggestions on how victims of cyberbullying could cope with the experience.

## **Theme 11: Advice on coping with cyberbullying**

The advice given by the participants to victims of cyberbullying included suggestions to ignore the cyberbullying, reporting the cyberbullying to someone one trusts, standing up to the bully and the establishment of an anti-bullying club. Participants also shared how they personally dealt with cyberbullying, namely by means of positive self-talk and being assertive.

### **Sub-theme 11.1: Ignoring the cyberbullying**

Most of the participants believed that a victim's best option would be to ignore the cyberbullying. Participants were of the opinion that by ignoring the cyberbullying, the victim would deny the cyberbullies the reaction that they were looking for. The cyberbullies would then get bored and move on to someone else. Although some of the participants suggested ignoring as a strategy to deal with cyberbullying, they believed that ignoring the cyberbullying was only a good option if the victim would be strong enough to do it, as ignoring the cyberbullying could make the victims feel like they didn't stand up for themselves. One participant explained:

*"If you keep quiet you can also feel more hurt because you feel that you didn't stand up for yourself."* (Participant 2)

The views stated above are reflected in the literature. Many victims do choose to ignore the cyberbully, or at least pretend to ignore the experience. However, this does not take away the emotional pain that cyberbullying causes (Dehue, Bolman & Völlink, 2008:219). Where some of the participants suggested that victims should ignore the cyberbullying, others advised that the victims should confront the bully.

### **Sub-theme 11.2: Confronting the bully**

A number of participants suggested that the victims confront or "stand up to" the bully as a way of dealing with the cyberbullying. Some participants believed that the bullying would intensify if an authority figure would become involved, therefore they regarded the best way to handle the cyberbullying was for the victims dealing with

the situation themselves. Their actions could include confronting the bully to determine what the reasons for bullying were or taking steps to prove the bully wrong. All participants believed that retaliation and revenge were not the best way to solve the problem of cyberbullying, of which the following response is an example:

*“I never do such things [retaliate] because I know it will come back to me and when it comes it will be worse.”* (Participant 4)

It was clear from two of the participants that once they had retaliated they experienced a constant inner struggle to process their actions and they also experienced guilt at what they had done. It is acknowledged that standing up to bullies or confronting bullies about their behaviour in positive ways could empower the victims and could be more likely to resolve the problem of cyberbullying and bullying. Unfortunately, many victims are too scared to do so due to a fear that the bullying would become worse (Beale & Hall, 2007:12; Stauffer et al., 2012:258; Wright et al., 2009:39). Some participants suggested that, instead of confronting the bully, victims of cyberbullying should report the bullying to someone they could trust.

### **Sub-theme 11.3: Reporting the cyberbullying to someone one trusts**

Participants identified “someone you trust” as being be a friend, a parent, an educator or another professionals such as a social worker, a psychologist and even the police. One participant knew all too well the struggle that victims face by keeping the cyberbullying to themselves:

*“I would encourage all victims to go and tell their parents or someone. Don’t keep it in because I know what happens if you just keep all the anger inside. You can tell your mom and dad that you are being bullied and then let them come to school to sort it out. Don’t distance yourself and keep quiet. They can also tell an educator and it can be sorted out in one day, and if not, then parents can be involved.”* (Participant 9)

Participants further recommended that victims of cyberbullying should seek professional help from a social worker or a psychologist in order to have counselling to work through all the emotions surrounding their experiences of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. One participant recalled that she went for counselling and there

she learned skills to control her anger by writing down her emotions thereby learning how to handle the experience of being a victim of cyberbullying.

In the literature it is also suggested that victims of bullying and cyberbullying need to be encouraged to report their experiences in order for them to receive the necessary support to deal with the bullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2009:28; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009:8; Twyman et al., 2010:199). The support could also be provided in a group context.

#### **Sub-theme 11.4: The establishment of an anti-bullying club**

One participant suggested that the school set up an anti-bullying club where victims could go to report bullying activities. The professionals who facilitate the process could then take the matter further. These professionals could handle the matter by, for example, calling in the perpetrators and their parents, involving educators and the school principal in dealing with the problem, and providing the victim with counselling. The participant responded as follows:

*“There should be anti-bullying clubs at schools. Then we can report bullying to them and they can help us first. If this doesn’t help then the parents can be phoned.”* (Participant 7)

The establishment of a mentorship or “buddy” system in schools, or an anti-bullying club as suggested by the participant, could help victims feel less alone and less fearful at school (Van der Valk, 2014:42).

Some of the participants suggested that the victims of cyberbullying could also empower themselves. One of the suggestions made, was the utilisation of positive self-talk.

#### **Sub-theme 11.5: Utilising positive self-talk**

A number of the participants explained that they dealt with their experiences of cyberbullying by utilising positive self-talk. They would, for example, express

happiness because they were able to determine who their real friends were. These were the friends that stood by them and supported them despite the rumours about the participants that were spread via electronic media. Two participants explained that they looked at the positive lessons that they learnt from their experience of cyberbullying, namely that they learnt how to control their anger and realised that aggression was not a solution to cyberbullying.

Positive self-talk is recognised as a strategy to deal with bullying and cyberbullying. It can be helpful to use positive self-talk to deal with negative emotions as well as looking for positive factors in negative situations (James et al., 2011:449; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2011:135). However, it is easier for victims of cyberbullying to look for positive factors in the situation if they are provided with support from other people in their lives (Van der Valk, 2014:43). By building up the victims' self-esteem, victims could be encouraged to look for positive factors in negative situations (Steiger et al., 2014:326). Some participants also indicated that being assertive helped them to cope with their experiences of cyberbullying.

### **Sub-theme 11.6: Being assertive**

Many of the participants reached a point where they decided that they were no longer going to be a victim of cyberbullying and that they were going to be assertive. The participants understood assertiveness to mean “standing up” for themselves, and not as retaliation towards the perpetrator or others. One participant, who left her previous school due to cyberbullying, explained being assertive as follows:

*“I decided that I was not going to let people do that to me again in my new school. I was going to be strong and stand up for myself.”*  
(Participant 6)

Another participant felt that she had reached a point where she decided that she was going to be stronger and not allow the cyberbullying to consume her every day thoughts and actions.

There were also participants who were of the opinion that one could be assertive by keeping quiet and ignoring the cyberbullies. These participants believed that by keeping quiet they would have some control over the situation as they would deny the cyberbullies the reaction that they were after. This reaction was explained as follows by a participant:

*“Even now I have friends who are spreading rumours. I said to myself, I am the mature one, I am just going to leave it and I am not going to spread rumours about her now. Then she is going to ask herself, why isn’t she coming and confronting me. I will give her no reaction so she can see it doesn’t bother me.”* (Participant 10)

Assertiveness, as indicated by the participants, could help victims of bullying and cyberbullying cope with the situation. Victims need to be taught that they can stand up to bullies by being assertive and not by being aggressive or violent (Agosto et al., 2012:40; Champion, 2009:72; Howard, 2014; James et al., 2011:450; Negley, 2012). Furthermore, bystanders can also be encouraged to stand up to bullies (Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012:722), as the role of the bystander in bullying and cyberbullying may instigate the bullies to pursue their actions.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

In line with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Berk, 2013:26; Keenan & Evans, 2009:36), the effects of cyberbullying regard the effects of various systems in a person’s life and point to the interrelatedness of systems in the participants’ lives. The findings of the study revealed that the exposure to cyberbullying affected the participants as a person and also in relation to different areas of their lives.

Participants, as victims of cyberbullying, were exposed to degrading and harmful messages and images via electronic media. They were mainly targeted through text messages and Facebook, as well as local websites (Stelemams, OuToilet and Tsamaya), where cyberbullies mostly made use of flaming (angry, vulgar messages), harassment (repeatedly sending messages) as well as denigration (posting harmful and/or untrue information).

Cyberbullying had an extremely negative impact on participants' holistic functioning. It affected, amongst others, participants' self-esteem and emotions, their school attendance, social functioning as well as the home situation of the participants. Additionally, participants indicated that cyberbullying was often followed by traditional bullying. However, a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the matter resulted in the phenomenon of cyberbullying being normalised and downplayed by parents, by the school system, and by some of the participants themselves.

Participants believed that the anonymity that the Internet provided enabled perpetrators to bully others. Victims of cyberbullying were hesitant to report the bullying to parents or authority figures, contributing to cyberbullying being a hidden phenomenon. This aspect was also experienced by the researcher who had difficulty in selecting a sample for the study as a number of potential participants who were identified by means of snowball sampling, were not willing to participate in the study and talk about their experience with the researcher.

The key findings of the study will be summarised in Chapter 4. Conclusions and recommendations based on the findings will also be presented.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying behaviours are often similar to that of traditional bullying; however, cyberbullying makes use of electronic media to bully victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:615). Research has shown that the incidence of cyberbullying among adolescents is extremely high and can have detrimental effects on both the victims and the bullies (Barlett & Gentile, 2012:124; Burnham et al., 2011:4; Lindfors et al., 2012:2; Steffgen et al., 2011:643). In this study, the researcher explored the experiences of adolescents with regards to cyberbullying. The key findings of the research will be summarised in this chapter and conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings, will be presented. The researcher will further discuss the attainment of the goal and objectives of the research study.

#### 4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying. In order to reach the goal of the study, the following objectives were stated:

- To explore the meaning of the concept “cyberbullying”.
- To explore and describe what the participants regard as cyberbullying.
- To explore and describe the different types of cyberbullying that participants were exposed to.
- To determine and report on the participants’ views on the effects of cyberbullying on themselves.
- To explore and describe the involvement of participants in the cyberbullying of others.
- To determine and report on what the participants regard as solutions to cyberbullying.

- To make recommendations for social workers, parents and other professionals regarding awareness and education about cyberbullying.

### **4.3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The key findings that will be discussed in this chapter focus on the occurrence of cyberbullying amongst adolescents, the effects thereof on the adolescent and the systems in which they are involved, the link between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, cyberbullying as a hidden phenomenon and participants' suggestions for dealing with cyberbullying.

#### **4.3.1 The occurrence of cyberbullying**

The literature review discussed in Chapter 2 points to an extremely high occurrence of cyberbullying amongst adolescents. The empirical findings of the study supported this fact.

- All the participants were aware of what cyberbullying entailed and viewed it as a practice that was intended to inflict harm on the victim.
- The intentions of cyberbullying identified by the participants, was to cause emotional distress and embarrassment for the victim, mainly by flaming, denigration and harassment as types of cyberbullying.
- Anonymity allowed the cyberbully to post extremely harmful content via electronic media, both in the form of text and images.
- Participants saw reasons for cyberbullying as jealousy, gossiping and adverse personal circumstances of the bully.
- Exposure to cyberbullying was often followed by traditional bullying, where victims were likely to be exposed to all three forms of traditional bullying (verbal, physical and relational bullying).
- Experiencing cyberbullying resulted in participants spending more time engaging with electronic media as they tended to feel paranoid about what was being posted on social networking sites and other websites about them and wanted to monitor it.

- Their access to and the frequency of their engagement with electronic media, as well as wanting to monitor if any content related to them have been posted, resulted in a perception of participants that there is “no escape” from cyberbullying.
- Participants also highlighted the role of those who would read the posted information but remain silent, thus the role of the bystander, as a role that could maintain the actions of the cyberbully.

#### **4.3.2 The effect of cyberbullying on the participants**

The participants reported a number of serious negative effects due to their experiences of cyberbullying. The reported effects were identified on three levels, namely emotional, social and academic levels.

- Emotional effects included negative feelings due to a loss of self-esteem and confidence, increased anger and aggression, embarrassment, sadness, paranoia and obsessive behaviours, and a loss of trust in people.
- Behavioural effects of cyberbullying manifested as withdrawal from others, retaliation and revenge aimed at the cyberbullies, and self-harm and suicide attempts.
- The consequences of intense emotional distress on the behaviour of the participants as victims of cyberbullying were evident in the fact that three participants considered suicide and another two participants had a family member and a friend respectively who committed suicide due to cyberbullying.
- Social effects of cyberbullying included a loss of interest in activities and social events. Some participants did not have any desire to be socially involved with their friends or families and found that they had withdrawn from social activities.
- The social effects of being a victim of cyberbullying were particularly evident in the peer group, which plays an important role in the lives of adolescents. Extremely negative experiences occurred when it was discovered that friends were perpetrators of bullying or that friends believed the false information posted via electronic media. On the other hand, friends who remained true to the victim

were able to provide support to the victim; often as these friends were also victims of cyberbullying.

- Cyberbullying had an effect on the academic performance of the victim. Victims often felt exposed and unsafe in the school environment and their school attendance dropped as a result, especially if the school system did not provide support to address the problem of cyberbullying. This lack of desire to focus on education and increase in absenteeism was a contributing factor to one participant failing a school grade.

### **4.3.3 The eco-systemic effects of cyberbullying**

In line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the participants in the study reported that cyberbullying (which can be regarded as a system of its own) did affect different systems in their lives, especially on the family and peer group.

- The relationship between participants and parents tended to be harmed where parents showed negative reactions towards the participants' disclosure of being a victim of cyberbullying.
- Participants tended to withdraw from social interactions with the peer group and activities involving friends and social events. However, where friends were supportive of the participant, involvement with the peer group tended to be maintained.
- The emotional strain and change in behaviour experienced by participants as victims of bullying, negatively affected the atmosphere in the home. As participants did not disclose being victims of cyberbullying, parents often did not understand the participant's reactions in the home. Participants experienced a rise in tension and conflict in the home as a result of their changed emotions and behaviours due to the cyberbullying.
- Where harmful messages were directed at family members of the victims, for example a parent or sibling, the effects thereof negatively affected the relationships and interactions among all members of the family. Some of the effects included reversal of roles (the child taking over a caring role in the family),

isolation of family members, conflict and ruined relationships within the family, and distrust in family members.

- Participants reported withdrawal from the peer group as a result of cyberbullying. This was mainly due to a lost in trust in friends or the perception that their friends did not understand their experiences as victims of cyberbullying.
- A number of participants believed that their friends were the perpetrators of the cyberbullying that they experienced. Some participants felt that they were trapped in friendships with bullies because they were too scared to leave the friendship out of fear for the retaliation. These experiences severely altered the way the participants viewed friendships and trusting relationships within the peer group.

#### **4.3.4 Cyberbullying as a hidden phenomenon**

Cyberbullying can be regarded as a hidden phenomenon. This fact is confirmed in the literature in Chapter 2 and was also indicated in the empirical findings of the study.

- The participants in the study confirmed that cyberbullying could be seen as a hidden phenomenon as the bullies could spread rumours and images via electronic media anonymously or using a false identity.
- Participants admitted that they did not like to talk about their cyberbullying experiences, neither to friends nor to family members. They confirmed that many victims would not be willing to talk about their experiences of cyberbullying at all. Silence about their experiences could contribute to the hidden nature of the problem.
- Furthermore, participants were hesitant to report bullying to their parents. This was often due to fears that the bullies would retaliate by intensifying the bullying, that their families would not understand them and that they would be blamed for the bullying, or that involving their parents would lead to further conflict within the family.

### 4.3.5 The role of support to victims of cyberbullying

The responses of the participants highlighted the fact that support for victims could enhance their wellbeing.

- The findings of the study indicate that the responses of others to disclosure of being a victim of cyberbullying play a significant role in the victim's handling of the situation. Some participants experienced negative and unsupportive responses from parents or school authorities, which confirmed their perception that others did not believe the seriousness of the situation.
- Participants regarded the support from friends as a valuable strategy to assist victims of cyberbullying to cope with the situation.
- Participants' suggestions on how to deal with cyberbullying emphasised the value of support. They suggested two strategies that would directly support the victim of cyberbullying, namely talking to someone one can trust, such as a parent, friend or educator, and establishing anti-bullying clubs.
- Participants mentioned that strategies such as confronting or ignoring the bully would require an inner strength from the victim, while another coping strategy suggested by them, positive self-talk, is indicated in the literature to be easier when the victim has someone who provides positive support. Retaliation as a means of dealing with the cyberbullying often resulted in participants experiencing negative feelings about themselves.

## 4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been reached regarding the study:

- There is a high incidence of cyberbullying amongst adolescents due to their increased access to communication technology. Communication technology can be seen as a system in line with other systems such as the family, friends and school, and adolescents spend large amounts of time engaging with this system.
- Due to its harmful intent and almost limitless reach, cyberbullying can have a far-reaching effect on the lives of adolescents, whether they are the victim or the

cyberbully. These effects include severely negative consequences relating to the adolescent's emotional, social and academic functioning.

- Cyberbullying has an effect on various systems in the life of the adolescent. It affects the adolescent as victim, but also has serious consequences in other systems, for example relationships and interactions within the family and the peer group, as well as the adolescent's school setting and education.
- Cyberbullying further has the potential to continue as traditional bullying in the form of physical, verbal and relational bullying.
- However, cyberbullying tends to remain a hidden phenomenon due to the anonymity it offers the bully and the reluctance of victims to tell their parents, friends or other adults about their experiences. The fact that the phenomenon tends to be hidden may deprive victims (and cyberbullies) from receiving support from others.
- Reluctance to disclose being a victim of cyberbullying is influenced by a number of factors, for example, by the reactions by others (such as parents, friends, school principals or educators) to the disclosure of being a victim, victims' fears of retaliation by the bully, and a perception among victims that others would not understand their experiences regarding cyberbullying.
- The reaction of others to the victim's disclosure of cyberbullying thus has a significant influence on the victim's sense of being understood and supported.
- Victims of cyberbullying tend not to disclose being a victim to their parents. However, they seem to find it easier to confide in a friend. Friends who were themselves victims of bullying or cyberbullying may be perceived as more understanding of the problem.
- There seems to be a tendency among parents, other adults and even victims themselves to normalise cyberbullying in an effort to deal with it. Such reactions may contribute to the hidden nature of the problem and undermine an appreciation of the seriousness of the matter. The serious nature of cyberbullying is evident in the suicidal thoughts and suicides among victims thereof.
- Although victims of cyberbullying may not seek support from others due to reluctance to disclose being a victim of cyberbullying, support to victims is

important as the victims tend to isolate themselves and feel that they are not understood by others.

## **4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the consultation of literature and the empirical findings of the research study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

### **4.5.1 The phenomenon of cyberbullying**

- Cyberbullying should be recognised as a phenomenon which could have serious consequences in the lives of the victim, the bully and the systems in which they are involved. Publications in professional journals, newspapers and magazines are examples of making the public aware of the phenomenon and its potential harmful consequences.

### **4.5.2 Adolescents as potential victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying**

- Adolescents need to be empowered to recognise the potential harm of cyberbullying and to learn strategies to handle cyberbullying. Education on the topic can be provided in setting such as schools, community and church centres and youth clubs. Education can benefit all role players in bullying, namely the bully, victim, bully-victim and bystander.
- School social workers or school psychologists can offer training in assertiveness skills and positive self-talk as powerful strategies that can be taught to adolescents in order to equip them to handle bullying situations.
- Schools can ensure that positive support systems are put in place for all adolescents should they experience bullying in any form. These systems can include facilities where bullying can be reported, as well as anti-bullying clubs and other peer support systems.

### 4.5.3 Parents

- Education regarding bullying and cyberbullying must be made available to parents in order to assist them in identifying warning signs in their children as either the victim or the bully. Schools could play an important role in parent education.
- Parents should make themselves familiar with technologies which are popular among their children in order to monitor their use of such technology effectively.
- Parents must play a more active role in the lives of their children and be aware of their daily activities. They must be aware of their children's use of mobile phones and the Internet.

### 4.5.4 The school

- Schools must accept a moral, ethical and legal responsibility to prevent and intervene in any bullying matter.
- Educators and other professionals employed by the school should take responsibility in handling any matter related to bullying and should never ignore such incidents. Educators are in a prime position in handling bullying in schools because they have access to learners and can continuously observe them and monitor warning signs from victims and perpetrators of bullying.
- Educators and other professionals at the school (social workers, psychologists and disciplinary officers) could establish a reporting desk where victims could report bullying incidents, as well as initiate anti-bullying clubs where victims could be supported.
- Should a learner report an incident of bullying to an educator or another professional, that person must take responsibility to investigate the matter with the aim of finding solutions.
- Schools need to ensure that there is a positive school climate for all learners, educators and other professionals employed by the school. All who attend the school should feel safe during school hours. The following strategies could contribute to a positive school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012:87):

- Educators should make an effort to know the names and circumstances (for example where they live and who they live with) of learners with whom they are in contact with.
- Educators should not have too many learners per class so that they can observe and monitor behaviours.
- Behaviours of learners should be monitored and problems should be responded to fairly and consistently.
- The reporting of inappropriate behaviours must be encouraged.
- Schools need to ensure that there is a counsellor on the premises to give learners the opportunity to handle emotional distress.

#### **4.5.5 The development and adherence to policies**

- It is extremely important for every school to have a policy in place that condemns the act of bullying in any form and contains guidelines for intervention and ways to handle bullying incidents.
- Schools should educate learners about the possible consequences of cyberbullying, specifically on consequences that could be a transgression of the laws of the country, such as the act of “sexting” that could lead to allegations related to child pornography.

#### **4.5.6 Further research**

- There is a need for further research on a larger scale to understand cyberbullying as a phenomenon as well as the effects that it has on both perpetrators and victims.
- Research could also include an exploration of strategies which could be effective in the prevention and early intervention in bullying and cyberbullying.

#### 4.6 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe adolescents' experiences regarding cyberbullying. The goal was achieved by achieving the objectives as summarised in Table 3.

Objectives of the study	Achievement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore the meaning of the concept "cyberbullying"</li> </ul>	This objective was achieved as reflected in the literature review presented in Chapter 2.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore and describe what participants regard as cyberbullying</li> </ul>	These objectives were achieved by means of the presentation of the empirical findings of the study in Chapter 3.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore and describe the different types of cyberbullying that participants were exposed to.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine and report on the participants' views on the effects of cyberbullying on themselves.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore and describe the involvement of participants in the cyberbullying of others.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine and report on what the participants regard as solutions to cyberbullying.</li> </ul>	This objective was achieved by the recommendations based on the findings of the study, presented in Chapter 4.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To make recommendations for social workers, parents and other professionals regarding awareness and education of cyberbullying.</li> </ul>	

#### 4.7 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

With the current study the researcher aimed to obtain a greater understanding of adolescents' experiences regarding cyberbullying in order to address a situation

experienced in practice. The following research question was formulated for the study: What are the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying? The achievement of the goal and objectives of the study allowed the researcher to answer the mentioned research question.

The empirical findings of the research study provided information that highlighted the extremely negative effects that cyberbullying could have on the victim as a person and on the victim's interactions with others and in the systems that he or she is involved. The research indicated that cyberbullying affected the victims on emotional, social and academic levels. It further affected the victims' relationships with family members as well as the atmosphere in the home. The victim's relationship with the peer group, which plays a significant role in the life of the adolescent, suffered many negative consequences. Other findings that could inform practice were the following: the hidden nature of cyberbullying as a phenomenon, the reluctance of victims to report bullying to their parents or others, and the value of support for victims of cyberbullying. It should also be kept in mind that cyberbullying does not only affect the victims, but also negatively affects the perpetrators thereof. Prevention and early intervention efforts in practice should keep the characteristics and the potential consequences of cyberbullying into consideration.

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## APPENDIX A

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What, in your opinion, is cyberbullying?
2. What type/s of cyberbullying do or did you experience?
3. What effects did that experience have on the way you see yourself (your self concept)?
4. What emotional effects did it have on you?
5. What effects did it have on your friendships and social life?
6. What other effects did that experience have on you?
7. Who knows that you were exposed to cyberbullying?
8. Did you at any time attempt to cyberbully other people? Please describe.
9. How, in your opinion, can one effectively deal with cyberbullying?

## APPENDIX B



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Social Work & Criminology

**Researcher:** Ms Tamsin Franks

**Contact details:** 084 699 6459

**Institution:** Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria

### INFORMED ASSENT

**Name of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Title of the Study:** The experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying.
- 2. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying. This will assist social workers, other professionals and parents in understanding this form of bullying.
- 3. Procedures:** I will be requested to take part in a face-to-face interview about my experiences of cyberbullying. The interview will take place at school during non teaching hours and will take about 60 minutes. The headmaster has given permission for the interviews to take place at the school. The interview will be tape-recorded and Ms Franks will take notes during the interview. Only Ms Franks and her supervisor will have permission to listen to the recordings and read the notes. The recordings and the notes will be handled with strict confidentiality and, at the completion of the research, will be securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the policy of the University.
- 4. Risks:** I understand that the interview will be about my experiences with regards to cyberbullying. There are no foreseen risks related to my participation in this study. However, I realise that it may be a sensitive topic for me. Therefore, if I experience any emotional distress as a result of this interview, I will have an opportunity for counselling with Ms Wieruszowski, a social worker.
- 5. Benefits:** I understand that there are no direct benefits for me for participating in the study. However, my participation will help social workers and other professional persons to have a better understanding how adolescents experience cyberbullying.

6. **Participants' rights:** I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

7. **Confidentiality:** The information received from me will be treated confidentially and no one will be able to identify me from the study. If I decide to withdraw from the study at any stage, the information from the interview will be destroyed. The results from this study will be published in the researcher's research report or in a professional journal, but my identity will not be made known.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Ms Franks at 084 699 6459. I understand my rights to voluntarily participate in the study and to withdraw at any time. I agree that I willingly participate in the study. I understand what the study is about, how and why it is being done. I am aware that the information will be stored for 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the policies of the University.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant : \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Social Work & Criminology

**Researcher:** Ms Tamsin Franks  
**Contact details:** 084 699 6459  
**Institution:** Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria

### INFORMED CONSENT

**Name of parent:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Title of the Study:** The experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying.
- Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying. This will assist social workers, other professionals and parents in understanding this form of bullying.
- Procedures:** My child will be requested to take part in a face-to-face interview focusing on his/her experiences regarding cyberbullying. The interview will take place at school during non-teaching hours and will take approximately 60 minutes. This will be done with the permission of the Department of Education and the headmaster of the school. The interview will be tape-recorded and the researcher will take notes during the interview. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have permission to listen to the recordings and read the notes. The recordings and the notes will be handled with strict confidentiality and, at the completion of the research, will be securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the policy of the University.
- Risks:** I understand that the interview will be about my child's experiences with regards to cyberbullying. There are no foreseen risks related to my child's participation in this study. However, this may be as sensitive topic and if my child does experience any emotional distress as a result of this interview, he/she will have an opportunity for counselling with Ms Wieruszowski, a qualified social worker.
- Benefits:** I understand that there are no direct benefits for me or for my child for participating in the study. However, my child's participation will help professionals to gain a better understanding of cyberbullying.

6. **Participants' rights:** I understand that my child's participation in the study is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

7. **Confidentiality:** The information received from my child will be treated confidentially and his/her identity will not be revealed at any stage. Should my child decide to withdraw from the study at any stage, he/she can do so with no negative consequences and information that was obtained from him/her will be destroyed. The results from this study will be published in the researcher's final research report or in a professional journal, but my child's identity will not be made known.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Ms Franks at 084 699 6459. I understand my child's rights as a research participant and I agree that he/she willingly participates in the study. I understand what the study is about as well as how and why it is being done. I am aware that the data will be stored for 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the policies of the University.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

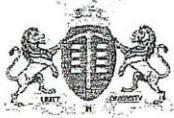
Parent : \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D



**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enq: MAKUBU S.S  
Directorate: POLICY & PLANNING  
Tel: (012) 543-1203  
Ref: 15 /2/ 6

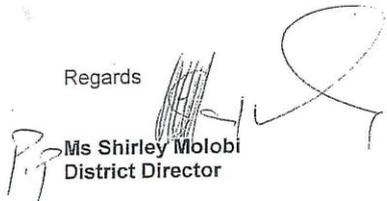
TO:  
FROM: SHIRLEY MOLOBI  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR  
DATE: 21 MAY 2013  
SUBJECT: RESEARCH REQUEST

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Tshwane North District, acknowledge receive application letter of research request from Tamsin Franks (Social Worker). Application is in order. In principle, Head Office approves all applications and District office communicates approval to relevant schools.

Kindly, be informed that we are awaiting head office before sending District memorandum to schools including researcher.

Regards

  
Ms Shirley Molobi  
District Director

DISTRICT: TSHWANE NORTH  
Tel: (012) 543 1479. Cell: 083 389 2968, Fax: 086 771 8195 | Email: Shirley.Molobi@gauteng.gov.za  
Wonderboom Junction Mall, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Corner Lavender &  
West Road, Wonderboom, 0066, Private Bag X945, Pretoria, 0001  
www.education.gpg.gov.za | Call Centre: 0800 005 175

## APPENDIX E



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

7 October 2013

Dear Prof Lombard

**Project:** The experiences of adolescents regarding cyberbullying  
**Researcher:** TS Franks  
**Supervisor:** Dr MP le Roux  
**Department:** Social Work and Criminology  
**Reference number:** 04423186

Further to our letter of approval, please note that this approval will be rescinded should the Department of Education not grant Ms Franks permission to conduct the research. Proof of this approval is therefore required.

Sincerely

**Prof. Sakhela Buhlungu**  
**Chair: Research Ethics Committee**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: sakhela.buhlungu@up.ac.za**

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof S Buhlungu (Chair); Dr L Blokland; Prof M-H Coetzee; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof KL Harris; Ms H Klopper; Dr Sepetla Molapo; Dr G Paleker; Dr C Panebianco-Warrens; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard ; Dr FG Wolmarans, Dr P Wood