Young people's perspectives on school support for cyberbullying victims: A qualitative study

Young people's perspectives on school support for cyberbullying victims: A qualitative study

Thesis submitted to the University of Galway
in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Letters (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)

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July 2024

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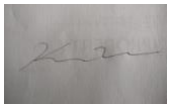
Declaration and Statement of contribution

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise at this or any other university.

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work.

Signed:  Kristine Minh Vu

Statement of contribution

The candidate was responsible for the design, data collection, analysis. and write-up of the study conducted in this research. The supervisory team, Graduate Research Committee, and local experts advised and provided support in conducting the research.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the immense support from both my supervisors, Caroline and Mairead. They were present and provided helpful feedback during the whole research and write-up process, supporting me in honing my writing skills.

I would also like to thank the local guidance counsellors and young people who were part of this study's PPI group. Their feedback on the research materials and design helped ensure recruitment and data collection met participants' needs. In addition, a great debt is owed to the post-primary schools that participated in this study (e.g. school staff involved) and all of the student participants who kindly volunteered their time and shared their views on how school support for cyberbullying victims can be improved.

Lastly, I could not have finished this master's degree without the unwavering encouragement and support from family and close friends (i.e. Nathalia, Angie, Marco, and Jana). Weekly chats and time spent together kept my spirits up and gave me the strength to overcome challenges along the way.

Abstract

Background: To date, research shows that multiple barriers exist in post-primary schools preventing cyberbullying victims from accessing support. Studies reveal that school personnel's limited understanding of cyberbullying and a deficit in youth-centred support systems hinder victims from coming forward for support. There continues to be a dearth of qualitative research on cyberbullying from adolescents' perspectives and scarce studies looking at how forms of school support can be improved for young adolescent victims. As such, this study aimed to investigate young people's (aged 13-15) perspectives on school support for cyberbullying victims, focusing on the Irish post-primary school context.

Methods: Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with 51 post-primary school students (16 girls, 34 boys, and 1 student who preferred not to label their gender) in Galway County, Ireland who were between the ages of 13 and 15. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (i.e. school PPI research contacts). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: Two main themes were found: (1) Trusting relationships and trustworthy systems of school support, and (2) Peer support. Being able to trust educators and support services for victims is key to helping young people feel comfortable reaching out for help. Building a trusting relationship with students involves adults showing their care for them. It also requires staff to possess appropriate knowledge and skills to help stop cyberbullying. Systems of support at school also need to be tailored to young people's needs and recognise their agency. Moreover, peers' demonstrating empathy for victims can help individuals recover and reconnect with classmates. Victims can cultivate better resilience by making new friends and strengthening their social connections at school. Lastly, schools can support students in building healthy rapport and friendships by hosting group social activities and workshops to help young people connect with one another.

Conclusion: Good relationships with educators and peers are the most valuable form of support for cyberbullying victims at school. Emotional support from both groups helps victims recover psychologically and socially. Furthermore, support systems need to change to meet victims' privacy and emotional needs better. Schools need to also support staff in

building trusting relationships with students and should also prioritise teaching youth how to support victims after an incident.

Introduction

Background: How cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying

Cyberbullying is a serious public health issue that affects approximately 50% of European children (aged 11-18), 60% of American children (aged 13-17) and 33% of South African children (primary and post-primary school students) (UNESCO, 2021). In Ireland, around 12.4% of post-primary school students report being bullied online (Foody et al., 2019). Commonly perceived as an intentional act of harm towards someone through electronic means (Hawkins, 2023; Ranney et al., 2020; Steer et al., 2020), it can involve sending or posting nasty messages, sharing false, private, or humiliating information about someone with others (i.e. through videos, images, posts), and exclusion (i.e. exclusion from an online group) (Gohal et al., 2023). Although it is primarily viewed as an extension of traditional bullying by young people (Hawkins, 2023; Ranney et al., 2020), research shows that cyberbullying is associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation than its face-to-face counterpart (Bonnano & Hymel, 2013; John et al., 2018; Landstedt & Persson, 2014). The potential for acts to be made public, committed anonymously, and inflicted at any time have been cited as factors that can exacerbate its severity (Cassidy et al., 2013; Gohal et al., 2023; Wolke et al., 2017). Studies additionally demonstrate that its pervasiveness can be psychologically more debilitating for victims than with in-person bullying (Dennehy et al., 2020). As such, it remains essential to identify how victims can be supported to help protect them from its possible severe effects.

Adolescence: A sensitive period of development

Being able to minimise the damaging impact of cyberbullying is especially critical during adolescence, as it is a sensitive period of development where experiences can have a strong and lasting effect on adolescents for better or for worse (Hensch & Bilimoria, 2012). Psychopathology peaks during this time and young people who have experienced stressful life events are at a heightened risk for developing mental health issues (Sisk & Gee, 2022). Moreover, youth are more susceptible to peer influence and peer rejection during this developmental window (Gardiner & Steinberg, 2005; Sebastian et al., 2010). The harsh consequences of certain cyberbullying experiences (i.e. someone sharing one’s intimate photo with others) can thus further amplify victims’ mental health

risks (Wolke et al., 2017). Conversely, youth's increased sensitivity can create opportunities for learning and resilience (Sisk & Gee, 2022). Colich et al. (2020) reveal that young people are also more receptive to positive forms of guidance, such as social approval and supportive caregiving, and that a correlation exists between support from caregivers and improved mental health. Support systems for teenage victims consequently need to factor in young people's special developmental needs to provide the most optimal care.

Support-seeking patterns in young people

At present, research indicates that schools (i.e. counsellors, teachers, principals) and families struggle in discerning how best to support cyber-victims (Chan et al., 2020; Macaulay et al., 2018; Mishna et al., 2021; Monks et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2016; Su et al., 2021). Both groups often are ill-equipped to help due to a poor understanding of cyberbullying and a lack of confidence in their skills to address the issue (Chan et al., 2020; Macaulay et al., 2018). Similarly, studies looking at adolescents' perspectives reveal that young people are also hesitant to confide in parents and teachers due to their limited knowledge of online contexts and the tendency for adults to confiscate devices instead of tackling bullying behaviour (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021). When faced with cyberbullying, youth prefer turning to friends for help as they perceive peers to be understanding of their problems and less judgmental than adults (Holt & Espelage, 2007; Parris et al. 2012; Souza et al., 2014). They also reach out to parents where there is trust and closeness in the relationship (Cassidy et al., 2018; Parris et al., 2012). However, research consistently finds that adolescents are least likely to seek support from teachers and school personnel due to a distrust in their ability to support victims (Chan et al., 2020; Ngo et al., 2021; Price & Dalgeish, 2010).

An education-wide approach to tackling cyberbullying

Despite young people's preference for opening-up to friends and parents, the literature reveals that an education-wide approach to combatting cyberbullying, where victims are supported by different people across the community (i.e. parents, school staff, peers, sports coaches) is key (Cornu et al., 2023). Studies to date highlight the interrelated nature of support within schools and illustrate the importance of adults working together in stopping cyberbullying, as well as each stakeholder group's unique role in helping victims

(Fu et al., 2021; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Su et al., 2021). For example, cyberbullying can occur at school or at home, and thus cooperation between parents and staff is essential to educating students on the topic and helping them acquire the skills to cope (Fu et al., 2021; Purdy & McGuckin, 2015; Su et al., 2021). Fu et al.'s (2021) longitudinal study found that a positive relationship between teachers and parents can significantly help reduce bullying involvement in children.

Teachers and counsellors can be powerful figures of support as they are usually first to witness classroom conflict between peers that precedes cyberbullying (Festl et al., 2015; Kashy-Rosenbaum & Aizenkot, 2020). Their proximity to students and peer interactions means they are well-positioned to intervene when bullying occurs and can also help establish a positive atmosphere amongst pupils to help reduce peer aggression (Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Ngo et al., 2021; Pyzalski et al., 2022). Support from teachers has also been found to protect victims' wellbeing when peer support is weak or ineffective (Hellfeldt et al., 2020). Nonetheless, research shows that barriers continue to exist between staff and students (i.e. issues of trust), preventing victims from reporting incidents and availing of potentially valuable support (Chan et al., 2020; Denney et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2021; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Ranney et al., 2020). Studies suggest that victims' needs are frequently neglected (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney, 2020); and currently, there is scarce research looking at adolescents' views on school support for victims. As help-seeking is strongly linked to staff intervention and better outcomes for victims, an exploration of how it can be encouraged and supported at school from the perspectives of young people is needed.

Current anti-bullying school initiatives in Ireland

In line with the direction of present research, a new anti-bullying plan called Cinealtas will be implemented in Irish primary and post-primary schools in 2024 to help address these gaps in school support systems (Department of Education, 2023). Cinealtas is based on UNESCO's education-wide approach to tackling bullying and cyberbullying and will centre in on strengthening partnerships between stakeholders (i.e. families, schools, young people), incorporating young people's voice in prevention and intervention strategies, and regular evaluations of anti-bullying measures used in schools (Cornu et al., 2023). The UNESCO education-wide approach to tackling bullying and cyberbullying

underlines the importance of national strategies in eradicating peer aggression (Spears & Slee, 2020; Cornu et al., 2023). It emphasises the need to venture beyond individual school responses to effectively prevent and stop bullying (O'Higgins-Norman et al., 20222). This approach requires good political leadership, strong policy frameworks, staff training, and education/curricula on positive school climates. It also calls for robust support for affected students (reporting systems, mental health support and monitoring of student behaviour) (O'Higgins-Norman et al., 2022). These different elements must work in conjunction with one another and involve all relevant stakeholders (i.e. academics, policy makers, school staff, social media companies) to ensure success. At present, anti-bullying school policies are mandatory in Ireland. However, the manner in which they are implemented remain ad-hoc and it is still uncertain which policies and forms of support are helpful in combatting bullying and cyberbullying (Foody et al., 2018). An education-wide approach can help bring to light essential components of support and how policies can be implemented to effectively reduce peer aggression. Involving multiple stakeholders and support systems can also help fill the gaps in care at school that young people have highlighted in recent studies (i.e. staff who understand cyberbullying and bullying, better reporting systems).

The Cinealtas Action Plan will require post-primary schools to each have a student support team (i.e. consisting of a guidance counsellor, year heads, SNA, and principal or deputy principal) and designated wellbeing officer responsible for monitoring bullying issues and students' intersecting mental health and educational needs (i.e. learning disability) (Department of Education, 2023). Members will combine their expertise and work together to support victims, adopting a whole-community ethos to eradicating bullying recommended by research (Cornu et al., 2023; Spears & Slee, 2020). Most importantly, Cinealtas will require schools to routinely work with young people to understand their needs and continually include their suggestions and ideas in anti-bullying supports, attending to a fundamental missing piece in cyberbullying prevention and intervention (Cross et al., 2015; Dennehy et al., 2018; Department of Education, 2023; Green et al., 2022; Spears & Kofoed, 2013).

To understand how cyberbullying victims can be supported better and to ascertain current anti-bullying initiatives in Ireland, this study has focused on investigating young people's perspectives on support for cyberbullying victims in post-primary school. The next section will review the literature on cyberbullying victims' help-seeking

behaviour and different types of support for victims in schools (i.e. counselling support, teacher interventions, reporting procedures). It will examine a wide variety of qualitative and quantitative studies, with particular attention to the Irish context and studies drawing on adolescents' viewpoints and lived experiences.

Literature Review

Introduction

Research examining school support for adolescent cyberbullying victims and help-seeking behaviour among this cohort has uncovered several issues that hinder victims from accessing help they need (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2018; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Parris et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Pyzalski et al., 2022; Ranney et al., 2020; Stacey et al., 2009). Barriers to support appear to exist on two different levels, with staff and school support systems both requiring changes to meet victims' needs better. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of socio-ecological development, staff and school support systems are a type of microsystem (i.e. people and structures that have a direct influence on adolescents' development). Microsystems and their interactions with one another (i.e. mesosystems) are critical social environments that hold the potential to nurture or diminish adolescents' acquisition of different skills (i.e. ability to cope with cyberbullying) (Doty et al., 2024). The impact of school anti-bullying procedures on staff's approach to dealing with cyberbullying incidents, for example, appears to be a key interaction that constrains student-staff relationships and the care provided to victims. Young people across various studies consistently highlighted the limitations of reporting procedures, counselling support, and punishment systems (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Pyzalski et a., 2022). They indicated that the latter forms of support tend to neglect young people's core needs (i.e. confidentiality), impeding victims from feeling comfortable reaching out for help at school.

Within this, staff's knowledge of and attitudes towards cyberbullying are also paramount to encouraging victims to come forward for help (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Macaulay et al., 2018). Numerous studies found that gaps in staff's awareness of cyberbullying and its effects on victims decreases students' confidence in their ability to understand them and resolve cases (Chan et al., 2020'; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021). In addition, students' voices continue to be largely omitted from interventions and preventative measures, hampering young people's trust in schools (Dennehy et al., 2018; Dennehy et al., 2020; Green et al., 2022; Hawkins, 2023; Paul et al., 2012; Ranney et al., 2020). Together, these interlinking microsystems and meso-systems appear to create roadblocks to support (Doty et al., 2024). This review will critically examine the literature

on school support for adolescent cyberbullying victims (ages 13-18) and their help-seeking behaviour to understand its separate and interlinking parts and how each succeeds and/or falls short in helping victims.

Bronfenbrenner's Theory: A framework for understanding supportive relationships at school

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social-ecological approach to development is a good lens through which to investigate support systems for targets of cyberbullying, as it looks at multiple environmental and social factors that impact on cyberbullying behaviour (Patel & Quan-Haase, 2023). Cyberbullying and related preventative measures and interventions are shaped by a myriad of systems (i.e. school policies, laws on cyberbullying, people who are key to young people's development). Bronfenbrenner (1979) labels them as microsystems (people directly supporting young people i.e. parents, school counsellors), mesosystems (interactions between microsystems i.e. parent-teacher relationships), macrosystems (wider school policies, education programs, cultural/societal attitudes), exosystems (environments that affect young people indirectly i.e. siblings' schools) and chronosystems (major life transitions, historical events) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lopez et al., 2021; Patel & Quan-Haase, 2023). Although microsystems may have a more visible effect on young people's ability to cope with cyberbullying problems, the latter are embedded in and greatly influenced by other systems (i.e. mesosystems), that in turn also affect overall help for victims, bullies, and bystanders (Patel & Quan-Haase, 2023). A lack of adequate staff training on cyberbullying and uncertain confidentiality measures following disclosures of incidents (i.e. macrosystems) have been reported to be issues that impinge on the quality of support given, for example (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020). As such, understanding the range of factors that affect a young person's ability to cope with cyberbullying issues (i.e. as a target, bully, bystander) is essential to discerning how to tackle it better. This study has focused on examining adolescents' microsystems as they are the immediate forms of support available at school (i.e. teachers, chaplains, year heads). The social-ecological approach's emphasis on the reciprocal interactions between different systems of support and their impact on young people's developing skills mirrors the holistic nature of UNESCO's education-wide approach to tackling bullying and cyberbullying (Cornu et al., 2023; Tong & Shidong An, 2023). Both frameworks highlight the importance of considering all systems

and stakeholders to improve support systems for victims. Ireland's recent Cinealta's action plan on bullying (2022) also prioritises this multi-pronged approach and aims to ameliorate school policies, student education (i.e. empathy skills training), staff training, and partnerships between different groups (i.e. students and the school community) by drawing on the voices of relevant stakeholders. Addressing cyberbullying through different tiers of support can help ensure all persons and systems concerned are equipped to deal with such issues.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises the importance of context in a young person's growth and resilience. Research reveals that school microsystems (i.e. staff, school climate, support systems) can be valuable sources of support; however, there is a dearth of knowledge around how individuals and systems within schools can help victims (Cassidy et al., 2013). Proximal processes (i.e. student-staff relationships), the complex, reciprocal relationships between a child and their microsystems, appear to be an essential element of support that could benefit from further investigation (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The consistent and bi-directional interactions within proximal processes enable both sides to learn from one another and reach a level of competency (i.e. improving empathy skills) (Tong & Shidong An, 2023). As young people often acquire an array of coping and social skills from surrounding adults and peers during adolescence, it is imperative to examine the proximal processes they have with both groups to discern how these relationships work or could be improved on to better support victims. Equally, the technology knowledge gap that separates school staff from young people necessitates a further look to understand what can help adults attain the awareness needed to relate to cyber-victims better.

Drawing on young people's voices

Children and young people's views should be listened to and considered on matters that impact them (UNCRC, 1991). To date, few qualitative studies on cyberbullying have been conducted from the perspectives of adolescents (Dennehy et al., 2020; Green et al., 2022; Hawkins, 2023) and research continues to show that a discrepancy exists between young people's experiences of the issue and adults' view of it (Hawkins, 2023; Mishna et al., 2021). Given that most adults have not experienced cyberbullying during their childhood as current younger generations have, it is imperative to turn to young people's expertise to understand what can be done to support victims

better at school (Spears et al., 2011). Various research has found that adolescents appreciate being listened to and having their opinions taken seriously by adults in research settings (Agatson et al., 2012; Dennehy et al., 2020; Green & Price, 2016; Pelfrey & Webber, 2015; Spears & Kofoed, 2013). Participants in these studies voiced that the same consideration of their needs and perspectives could be applied in school approaches to dealing with cyberbullying. As present support systems have primarily been shaped by adult educators and researchers, it is vital to look to adolescents' viewpoints across the literature to understand what can be changed to improve school support for victims and how research can be expanded on to strengthen our understanding of the topic.

Trustworthy relationships with school staff

Support from school staff shows promise in being able to help victims recover emotionally (Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Nagar & Talwar, 2023) and in teaching students about the effects of cyberbullying on victims (Pyzalski et al., 2022). However, adolescents continue to only report incidents to educators on occasion, with about 25% of victims in Patchin & Hinduja's (2016) survey stating they confided in a member of staff. For the most part, youth have lack of trust in school personnel and claim that ineffective staff responses and a widespread distrust in their ability to help victims are what dissuade most from disclosing cases at school (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Young people from multiple studies suggested that being able to trust staff and having a good relationship with them are imperative to feeling comfortable seeking support for cyberbullying problems (Chan et al., 2020; O'Moore, 2012; Navarro, 2016; Parris et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Pyzalski et al., 2022). Research also finds that adults need to be perceived as reliable and skilled for victims to feel confident about reaching out for help – be it for counselling sessions or in-class advice (Chan et al., 2020; Childline, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Parris et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015). Moreover, students from Madigan et al.'s (2010) study postulated that staff can gain students' trust by learning to relate to adolescents' experiences, being willing to learn about cyberbullying without judgment, and not exhibiting favouritism. Findings from other research similarly implied the need for staff to enhance their knowledge of cyberbullying and bullying behaviour to be able to connect to young people better and encourage victims to open-up (Chan et al., 2020; Hawkins, 2023; Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020). They indicate that staff can improve their skills in tackling

cyberbullying by first understanding how adolescents experience victimisation and how it affects them.

Understanding the relational and nuanced aspects of cyberbullying to connect to victims

The tendency for teachers to blame youth's technology use for a young person's involvement in cyberbullying instead of looking to their relational issues with peers deters many victims from reaching out for support (Dennehy et al., 2020; Giminez-Gualdo et al., 2018; Mishna et al., 2021). Adolescents across several qualitative studies bring to light the close link between cyberbullying and face-to-face peer conflict (Agatson et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Hawkins, 2023; Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020; Reason et al., 2016; Steer et al., 2020). Youth participants cite that in-person bullying and cyberbullying tend to overlap; with face-to-face aggression often spilling over into online interactions with peers and online bullying impacting relationships and interactions at school (Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020). While young people are adamant that cyberbullying stems from in-person relational problems, such as jealousy, revenge and power imbalances between friends, adults focus their attention on online safety issues and believe restricting students' social media and device privileges can help fix matters (Dennehy et al., 2020; Midamba & Moreno, 2019). They additionally struggle to understand the crucial role of the internet in young people's social lives, and that forbidding the use of apps or devices can further isolate youth from peers (Stacey et al., 2009). Mishna et al.'s (2021) research on different stakeholder perspectives underscores the distance between adults' and young people's conception of cyberbullying; revealing that teachers frequently underestimate the relational roots of cyberbullying while young people emphasise its importance. This can lead to unattended cases and a lack of appropriate support for victims, further reducing students' confidence in staff's ability to help.

Young people also avoid turning to staff for help as they are often unsure whether certain incidents warrant staff intervention (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2018; Steer et al., 2020;). Distinguishing the difference between 'teasing' and aggression can be challenging and adolescents are occasionally ashamed of seeking support for less severe cases for fear of appearing weak and exposing personal flaws that made them vulnerable to victimisation (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Steer et

al., 2020). Simultaneously, individuals posited that teachers and parents can sometimes overestimate the severity of cyberbullying and undermine youth's ability to cope independently (Stacey et al., 2009). Young people point out that peer interactions are nuanced and that some comments are jokes between friends and not a form of aggression (Ranney et al., 2020; Steer et al., 2020). Peer interactions and conflict seem to exist on a continuum and its variable impact on adolescents requires staff to capture a better understanding of its different contexts and when it is considered harmful. Although youth tend to prefer dealing with incidents on their own to not 'make a big deal' of matters, they argue that minor incidents still need some form of intervention and that unacknowledged cases can lead to victims suffering more long-term (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021).

Moreover, research additionally shows that staff's minimisation of cyberbullying - where surface-level solutions are offered and victims and bullies are recommended to make amends without addressing underlying conflict - hinders youth from confiding in them (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2020). Adolescents expressed a need for more in-depth lessons on coping, empathy and conflict-resolution and believe that schools could teach students how to deal with peer conflict better (Dennehy et al., 2020; Ranney et al., 2020). Findings from Pyzalski et al.'s (2022) study show that thorough counsellor interventions can help bolster bullies' moral engagement and empathy for victims and assist them in understanding how their behaviour was unkind. Furthermore, studies reveal that positive interactions between staff and students can also help pass down coping skills to students, equipping them with the resilience to handle interpersonal issues (Dietrich et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2023).

Coping skills acquired through supportive relationships

Current research underlines the value of positive teacher-student relationships in helping victims through cyberbullying issues (Lee et al., 2018; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Wang et al., 2016). Teachers can be helpful mediators as cyberbullying is often linked to interpersonal conflict that takes place during class (Festl et al., 2015; Kashy-Rosenbaum & Aizenkot, 2020). A few recent studies investigated varying types of teacher social support, drawing on House's (1981) support theory, to discern which types of help are preferable and most effective in supporting victims (Bastiaensens et al., 2019; Boulton et al., 2011; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Zeng et al., 2022). Social support can be defined as the "perception

and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network" (Munoz-Laboy et al., 2014, p. 4). House (1981) outlines four fundamental types of social support: emotional (i.e. provision of care, empathy, trust), instrumental (i.e. actions taken or services provided to help individuals), appraisal (i.e. support that helps individuals self-evaluate and make sense of a problem), and informational (i.e. advice and links to services). Research has found that students tend to prefer emotional, appraisal, and instrumental forms of support in helping them deal with bullying or cyberbullying problems (Bastiaensens et al., 2019; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Zeng et al., 2022). This highlights the benefits of having tangible help from teachers in resolving an incident, and care and emotional advice from them in boosting a victim's ability to cope. The interactions with teachers involved in the provision of these forms of support can be perceived as a type of proximal process that helps young people hone skills to cope with cyberbullying (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Emotional and appraisal forms of support, where teachers are attuned to students' wellbeing and their close interactions help individuals make sense of circumstances and emotions, appear to be a powerful proximal process that can help young people acquire resilience (Boulton et al., 2013; House, 1981).

Emotional support from teachers has been found to help foster a sense of connectedness among students, promoting cooperation and preventing bullying from occurring (Allen, 2010; House, 1981). Helping students through various problems can also facilitate young people to learn how to regulate their emotions (Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Emotional regulation can be defined as the skill in processing and managing various emotional states (i.e. anger, anxiety) (Gross & John, 2003). Teachers' feedback on a range of issues, commonly called 'appraisal support' (House, 1981), can help victims become more aware of their emotions and negative coping strategies (i.e. rumination or self-blame), and learn healthier ways of dealing with distress (i.e. self-acceptance) (Arato et al., 2020). Maladaptive emotional regulation skills have been associated with cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation among young people (Den Hamer & Konijn, 2016; Gianesini & Brighi, 2015; Vranjes et al., 2018) Thus, teachers' ability to intervene and provide support directly can help victims attain the skills needed to cope without delays, possibly buffering them from the more detrimental effects of victimisation. Youth from Pyzalski et al.'s (2022) qualitative research equally stressed the importance of good student-staff relationships in helping victims gain emotional resilience.

They further posited that all school personnel can provide valuable help and argued for a school-wide (i.e. sport coaches, counsellors) initiative in building rapport with students.

School reporting processes - A need for better confidentiality and student-centred support

Although positive student-staff relationships appear to be a central form of support for victims, they are deeply connected to and shaped by school anti-bullying procedures. Patel & Quan-Haase (2023) posit that microsystems and wider tiers of influence (i.e. meso-systems, exo-systems) are not siloed and work in close conjunction with one another. Incident reporting systems, punishment systems, and prevention measures operate alongside and influence student-staff relationships and subsequently young people's willingness to seek help. Findings from several studies suggest that post-primary schools' reporting procedures and terms of confidentiality for disclosed incidents affect student-staff relationships; acting as an additional barrier to support (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Navarro, 2016; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015). The interconnected nature of staff relationships and roles within schools can threaten the confidentiality of victims' disclosures and their trust in staff (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020). In Ireland, guidance counsellors provide both mental health and scholastic support to students; and occasionally, staff work as teachers and counsellors (Hearne et al., 2017). Participants from Dennehy et al.'s (2020) study expressed their discomfort in confiding in their guidance counsellor as they also worked as a teacher at their school. The double role that teachers and counsellors have in schools can create a conflict of interest; jeopardising students' confidentiality and their sense of ease opening-up about peer issues. Victims might not reach out for support as their counsellor might know their peers or bully through their work as a teacher.

In Chan's (2020) study on Malaysian students' and counsellors' perspectives on cyberbullying, most participants claimed that pupils have little trust in counsellors as they usually share information about students with other staff without their consent. Equally, youth in Pelfrey & Weber's (2015) study emphasised their lack of confidence in staff, explaining school protocols require them to respond to cyberbullying incidents in rigid and impersonal ways (i.e. teachers needing to first report cyberbullying to disciplinarians before helping victims). Participants argued that this process prevents teachers from providing support that corresponds to each unique situation and person and can impede

victims' needs from being met (Pelfrey & Webber, 2015). Although sharing information about victims with other staff can be well-intentioned and may help some students, these processes appear to violate young people's right to determining conditions that affect their wellbeing and safety (i.e. confidentiality and autonomy).

The anonymous dimension of cyberbullying also appears to undermine the effectiveness of incident reporting, leaving adolescents less certain about involving school staff. In Wang et al.'s (2019) study, students asserted that, although teachers are responsible for helping victims, the frequency of anonymous perpetration often precludes them from being able to put a stop to bullying behaviour. Youth in Smith et al.'s (2008) study held similar sentiments and explained that it is easier for cyberbullies to deflect responsibility and avoid being accused or experiencing consequences for their aggression. Furthermore, the ability to delete and alter messages/posts appears to make educators hesitant about following through with reported incidents (Agatson et al., 2012). It seems that perpetrators' ability to evade responsibility over cyberbullying acts, through anonymity and the alteration of texts/posts, lessens the benefits of seeking support from staff.

Investigation processes and punishment systems

Responses from principals/administrators and a school's investigation process also contribute to victims' confidence in their school's ability to help them (Agatson et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). The standard protocol of gathering specific evidence around an incident and naming the bully/bullies involved can prevent adolescents from making a report. In focus group interviews carried out by Agatson et al. (2012), adolescents explained that administrators' direct mediation of incidents with bullies often further escalates circumstances. As bullies know they are being investigated, they can become more secretive in their aggressions. Moreover, school protocols that insufficiently hold bullies accountable can worsen conditions for victims. Students from Mishna's et al.'s (2009) research complained that their school's reliance on parents to administer consequences for their children's involvement in bullying/cyberbullying led to many aggressors averting punishment for their behaviour, as parents sometimes avoid getting involved in such issues. Confronting bullies without the complete consent of victims and an inadequate system of punishment and accountability appear to put victims at risk of further mistreatment (Agatson et al., 2012).

There is also consensus among young people that standard punishment systems for cyberbullying need to be changed to ensure consequences appropriately match the severity of acts (Agatson et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2021). They asserted that punishment given to aggressors do not always target the core issues behind cyberbullying, dissuading victims from reporting incidents. Youth who have been cyberbullied explain that they forgo confiding in staff as consequences can be disproportionate and they do not wish for peers to be punished harshly (Mishna et al., 2021). They also cite that hardline consequences for cyberbullying, such as suspension from school, often cause retaliation and further harm to victims and provide aggressors time to engage in further cyberbullying (Agatson et al., 2012). It seems that forms of punishment for more serious cases need to shift towards helping cyberbullies change instead of only reprimanding their behaviour.

In addition to ameliorating punishment systems, adolescents across several studies emphasised the need for a more restorative approach to preventing and combatting issues of cyberbullying (Dennehy et al., 2020; Pyzalski et al., 2022; Ranney et al., 2020). They communicated a need for more skills strengthening to help students work through peer conflict (i.e. online and offline) and interventions that recognise young people's agency, skillset, and resources. Students in Dennehy et al.'s (2020) study explained that school programs on social media and digital citizenship frequently treat youth like children and fail to address relational problems underpinning cyberbullying. Adolescents stressed that learning better coping strategies for peer conflict and how to empathise with others would be most beneficial (Dennehy et al., 2020; Ranney et al., 2020). They asserted that hearing real stories about cyberbullying and its effect on individuals could help students cultivate empathy for victims and be effective in preventing cyberbullying (Agatson et al., 2012). Studies additionally show that improving cognitive empathy, or mental perspective taking, is effective in increasing positive cyber-bystander behaviour (Barlinska et al., 2015; 2018). Empathy-based skills-strengthening appears to be a vital form of anti-bullying education that could be adopted and used in schools more.

Peer Support

Across studies investigating adolescent coping strategies for cyberbullying, participants highlighted that telling a friend about an incident was helpful and/or a preferred way of coping (Adiyanti et al., 2020; Aricak et al., 2008; Parris et al., 2012; Price & Dalgleish., 2010; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Souza et al., 2014). During

adolescence, young people increasingly spend more time with peers and peer relationships begin to play a significant role in young people's social lives and development (Brown, 2004). Time spent with peers is associated with positive social support and having a good support network and friendships have been found to be correlated with fewer adverse effects from peer rejection and peer issues (Hodges et al., 1999; Rigby & Bagshaw, 2001; Souza et al., 2014). Similarly, Zych et al.'s (2019) review of studies examining protective factors against bullying and cyberbullying victimisation found that positive peer interactions are a crucial buffer against being a bully or victim.

Perceived social support from friends has also been shown to be a safeguard against cyber-victimisation (Arato et al., 2022). Various studies reveal that socially isolated and loner-type adolescents are more likely to be victimised than adolescents with friends (Eslea et al., 2004; Navarro et al., 2012; Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Equally, students placed in the same class as their best friend report lower rates of victimisation than those without a best friend in their class. (Boulton et al., 1999) Research suggests, however, that it is the quality of young people's friendships that helps prevent or mitigate the impact of victimisation (Adiyanti et al., 2018; Foody et al., 2019; Healy, 2013; Hodges et al., 1999). Being able to confide in friends about peer issues and challenges at school can help victims regulate their emotions (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Studies looking at the impact of victims seeking support from friends similarly found that reaching out to friends for help buffers against symptoms of depression (Fanti et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2007; Machmutow et al., 2012). Bollmer et al. (2005) postulate that adolescents' willingness to support friends and closeness between friends are important aspects of friendship that can act as protective factors against bullying.

Furthermore, peers who witness cyberbullying can play a pivotal role in stopping online peer aggression (Moxey & Bussey, 2020). Cyberbullying bystanders often intervene by either blocking or clicking on the report button online to support a target (Feijoo et al., 2023). In addition, online bystanders also engage in constructive and aggressive forms of intervention seen in offline bystanders (Luo & Bussey, 2019). They sometimes intervene by telling an adult, comforting the victim, and/or telling the bully to stop (constructive interventions) (Moxey & Bussey, 2020). Some bystanders also retaliate aggressively through direct insults/name-calling or by sharing humiliating photos/videos of the aggressor or spreading rumours online about the aggressor. As cyber-aggression can be inflicted publicly and anonymously, aggressing a perpetrator back through online means (i.e. image

sharing) can lead to further bullying and the escalation of peer aggression (Moxey & Bussey, 2020).

Despite strong links found between friendship and protection from victimisation, peers and friends do not always stand up to or try to stop bullies on their classmate's behalf (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2017; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Song and Oh, 2018). Although peers that witness cyberbullying hold the power to halt bullying behaviour, studies show that most bystanders avoid getting involved (Dillon and Bushman, 2015; Freis and Gurung, 2013; Huang and Chou, 2010; Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2017; Song and Oh, 2018; Van Cleemput et al., 2014). There are various reasons behind the decision to ignore witnessed incidents; with social contexts greatly influencing young people's choice to intervene (Song and Oh, 2018). Firstly, bystanders are less likely to step in to defend victims when peers are present as they usually expect others to intervene (Obermaier et al., 2016; Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2017). They are also likely to remain silent if speaking up puts them at risk of being bullied or mistreated themselves (Forsberg et al., 2014). Moreover, to preserve social connections, bystanders tend to avoid defending victims when they have a positive relationship with bullies and are alone when witnessing an incident. However, the likelihood of them intervening increases if they are in the presence of others (Song & Oh, 2018). Adolescents are susceptible to peer influence and the latter trends in bystander intervention reveal that peers and social expectations can impact adolescents' moral engagement and decision to help victims (Gardiner & Steinberg, 2005; Sebastian et al., 2010). As such, educational interventions that teach young people how to navigate difficult social contexts to intervene as a bystander could be implemented to help support students in speaking out against cyberbullying (Song & Oh, 2018).

Young adolescents' perspectives on school support for cyberbullying victims

It is evident that school support systems and educators need to align the support for victims with adolescents' needs more. Youth are often dissuaded from reaching out for help due to staff's limited understanding of cyberbullying, a lack of confidence in their ability to support victims, and insufficient trust within student-staff relationships (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al, 2021; Parris et al., 2012). In addition, school reporting procedures and punishment systems can impinge on young people's relationships with staff and compromise victims' confidentiality and wellbeing (Agatson et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015). Peers and friends are positive sources of support and can help

protect youth from being victimised; however, they often struggle to intervene as a witness to cyberbullying (Song & Oh, 2018). Yet, research shows that good relationships with staff and peers are powerful forms of support that equip young people with the emotional resilience and skills needed to cope with cyberbullying problems (Adiyanti et al., 2018; Hellfeldt et al., 2020; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Zych et al., 2019). To date, studies have investigated different aspects of school support for victims of cyberbullying; however, they have principally skimmed the surface and have not uncovered how positive relationships with staff and peers are cultivated (Nagar & Talwar, 2023).

As research reveals cyberbullying rates peak in early adolescence (ages 13-15), further research with this age group needs to be carried out to shed a light on how they can be supported at school (Kowlaski et al., 2019). Early adolescence is a crucial period of transition and development, with most youth beginning post-primary school and adapting to new social environments during this time (Dahl et al., 2018). The macro and chrono-systems outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasise the importance of critical development periods in a person's growth and acquisition of skills (Doty et al., 2024). With this in mind, this study focused on gaining an understanding of how students, aged 13-15, perceive the support (i.e. to prevent, stop, and cope with issues of cyberbullying) for victims of cyberbullying at their post-primary school. It also sought to understand how support for cyberbullying victims in post-primary schools can be improved from the perspectives of young adolescents.

Research Questions

a) What are students (ages 13-15) perspectives on school support (i.e. support from staff, education and prevention programs, mental health counselling and pastoral support) for victims of cyberbullying?
b) How do students (ages 13-15) believe the school support for victims of cyberbullying can be improved?

Methodology

Aims

This study aimed to gain an understanding of how students, aged 13-15, perceive the support (i.e. to prevent, stop, and cope with issues of cyberbullying) that is provided to victims of cyberbullying at their post-primary school. It also sought to capture an understanding of how support for cyberbullying victims in post-primary school can be improved from the perspectives of students (aged 13-15).

Design

Face-to-face, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted to investigate young people's (ages 13-15) perspectives on school support for victims of cyberbullying. Open-ended interview questions were used in the focus group discussions to support participants' in exploring their views on support for cyberbullying victims at school. In addition, collage art was used to support participants in their first brainstorming session on their ideas and perspectives on cyberbullying and prepare them for their first group discussion on the topic (focus group 1). Vignettes portraying different cyberbullying scenarios were also used to facilitate participants in exploring their perspectives on the research topic (focus group 2).

Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) research guided the planning and development of the study. Two advisory groups were established and consulted before data collection to ensure the recruitment materials and research design met participants' needs.

Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the focus group interviews. An inductive form of TA was carried out, beginning with the raw data to develop themes and possible theories. In addition, reflexive note taking was carried out throughout the research process to maintain an awareness of personal biases, beliefs, and assumptions and how these may have influenced the research.

Participants

Three post-primary schools (2 co-ed schools and 1 all boys school) in County Galway, Ireland participated in this study. Each school aimed to recruit 15-20 students (ages 13-15) to help reach the goal of 50 participants. Overall, 51 students across the three

schools participated in this research study (16 girls, 34 boys and 1 student who preferred not to mention their gender). The inclusion criteria for participation were enrolment in first to third year in an Irish post-primary school, aged 13-15 years at the time of participation, and parental consent.

PPI Research

A youth PPI group (three post-primary school students aged between 15 –18 years from County Galway) and a guidance counsellor PPI group (three post-primary school guidance counsellors from Counties Galway and Clare) were formed to help review the recruitment materials, research design, and focus group safety protocol (i.e. measures outlined to protect participants' wellbeing and safety) (Grundy et al., 2018). PPI research consists of involving members of the public in guiding all or selected stages of a study (Mitchell et al., 2018). The involvement of knowledgeable laypersons can help ensure different aspects of a research study (i.e. design of interviews) appeal to and satisfy participants' needs (Grundy, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2021; Pollard et al., 2015). Although PPI research is recommended at all stages of a study, it was only used at the initial stages of this research due to time and resource constraints (Mitchell et al., 2021; Pollard et al., 2015).

The PPI groups were formed in September 2022 and meetings were carried out in September (youth group) and October (guidance counsellor group) 2022 in the Psychology Building at the University of Galway. Notes were taken during and after the PPI meetings and the meetings were not recorded. An outline of the PPI meetings can be found in _____. Members of both groups were recruited through convenience and snowball technique sampling (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). A member from each group was recruited through personal contacts and each member then helped recruit the other members from their professional or school cohort. Book vouchers, which were funded by the University of Galway, were offered to advisory members for their participation (20-euro vouchers for guidance counsellors and 10-euro vouchers for students).

The meeting with the guidance counsellor PPI group focused on consulting members' views on how participant wellbeing and safety can be promoted and protected during the focus groups. A small set of open-ended questions were used in the meeting to guide a discussion on the latter topic. Members were consulted on how the focus groups could be formed to ensure participant wellbeing and positive rapport between young

people. They were additionally asked to give their opinion on the focus group vignettes, brainstorming activities and interview questions to ensure these materials would be sufficiently appropriate for, and sensitive to the needs of young adolescents. Lastly, they were also consulted on the focus group safeguarding protocol and were asked to evaluate the forms of mental health support to be offered to participants during and after participation (i.e. free counselling links, support from chaplain at school). Drawing on guidance counsellors' perspectives around the overall safeguarding helped ensure the focus groups consisted of appropriate materials and had enough support in place to foster a safe research environment for adolescents. Members approved of the safety protocol (i.e. procedure for responding to and supporting participants experiencing distress) and materials created for the focus groups. Moreover, they suggested for the consent forms to include a section at the end asking parents and prospective participants to inform the researchers about any concerns and special requests (e.g., . to not be placed in a group with someone with whom a participant has had conflict with) ahead of participation. Following the meeting, the consent forms were amended to include the above suggestion.

Two meetings were held with the youth PPI group. The first meeting concentrated on understanding members' views on the focus group materials, recruitment, and how teenage participants should be treated in research. A series of questions were first provided to help guide a discussion on how research participation can be made more appealing to young people. Furthermore, members were given copies of the study's consent and information forms, recruitment posters and an outline of the focus group activities (i.e. icebreakers, interview questions, group activities: collage workshop and vignettes (fictional cyberbullying scenarios) to review. They were asked to evaluate the recruitment and research materials and to give suggestions on how the latter can be changed to better cater to participants' needs, interests, and concerns. Members highlighted that offering an incentive/reward for participation, outlining how studies can contribute to improving issues concerning young people, and involving younger facilitators that adolescents can relate to are vital to recruiting young people. In addition, they recommended for teen-friendly language and shorter explanations to be used in the consent forms and recruitment posters to increase young people's interest in participating.

Furthermore, members supported the use of a rapport-building workshop before the official focus group interview to support participants in becoming acquainted with the facilitators and the process of participating in a focus group. They underlined the

importance of treating teen participants as equals in the research process and the importance of adopting a non-judgmental approach. Equally, they pointed out the need for interview questions and the vignettes to be worded sensitively to prevent participants with potential histories of victimisation from becoming triggered. They suggested instead that the vignettes and interview questions to avoid asking participants to imagine themselves in the shoes/position of a fictional character or victim. Lastly, they supported the use of mixed-gender focus groups; explaining the latter can support boys and girls to learn from one another, stimulate more interesting discussions on the research topic, and prevent cliques of peers/friends from occurring. Amendments to the interview and vignette questions and recruitment materials were made according to members' suggestions after this first meeting.

A second meeting was held with the youth PPI group over Zoom in December 2022 to review changes made to the focus group design and to evaluate the vignettes. Due to a limited amount of time, members had not evaluated the vignettes at depth in the first meeting. This meeting centered on their views and suggestions around the three focus group vignettes. Members were additionally asked to come up with a fictional cyberbullying scenario that could be used as a vignette in the focus group activity. One member suggested that one of the vignettes involve a fake video showing a student committing a petty crime and for this video to be passed around among peers. The two other PPI members held favourable views of this suggested vignette; and thus, it was adapted and used in the third focus group vignette.

Philosophy

The philosophical underpinnings of this study consisted of a constructivist ontology and an experiential epistemology. It sought to explore participants' constructions of reality from their subjective viewpoints and experiences. This approach was selected as I believe phenomena, such as cyberbullying victimisation and the experience of receiving support for such issues, can only be completely understood by investigating the perspectives and experiences of those most affected by it. It also helped explore *how* support systems can be improved to aid victims better. To date, most research on cyberbullying has been quantitative in nature and has fallen short in fully uncovering how support systems work or fail in helping victims. Adopting an experiential and constructivist approach can help address this gap in the research on support for cyberbullying victims.

Procedures

The recruitment of schools was achieved using convenience sampling. Post-primary schools in the West of Ireland were contacted and invited to participate in the study by email or by phone. Recruitment was also supported by the guidance counsellor PPI group, which was established to support and guide the overall research. Two of the guidance counsellors, who were part of the advisory group, helped recruit the post-primary schools where they work to participate in this study and the third participating school was recruited with the help of a research contact at Dublin City University's Anti-Bullying Centre.

The recruitment of student participants was carried out with the help of a main school contact (i.e. guidance counsellor) once schools confirmed their interest in participating. Basic information about the study was disseminated through posters and the main school contacts also explained what participation involved for students. They handed out consent and information forms to prospective participants and these forms outlined what participation involved in further detail and the consent/assent processes for parents and adolescents. School 1 gave out 10 euro canteen vouchers to participating students as compensation for their time and involvement in the study. Students were given paper vouchers that stated they participated in this study, allowing them to make purchases at the canteen up to 10 euros. None of the participants were involved in recruiting fellow classmates.

To take part in this study, participants had to give written assent and their parents/guardians had to give written consent to confirm they read and understood what participation consists of and that they agreed to their child participating. Students were given 1-3 weeks to decide if they wanted to take part in the study and it was clearly outlined in the information sheets that they were not obliged to participate. Moreover, students and parents were made aware of the potential risks to participating (e.g., experiencing distress after discussing cyberbullying and the support available for victims) and that participants could withdraw participation at any time before or during the focus group interviews. Furthermore, they were made aware in the information sheets that they had one month from the date of their last focus group interview to withdraw their data (i.e. interview speech extracts). If a participant decided to withdraw their data, their speech extracts would be removed from the study. Speech extracts were organised by school and participant pseudonym. In the end, none of the participants withdrew their data.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups were selected as the interview method to help ensure the interview environment was youth-friendly, engaging, and supportive of participants in opening-up about their views (Adler et al., 2019; Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Focus group interviews can be defined as, "carefully planned discussion[s] designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 2). They can provide the social interactions needed to support some participants in elaborating on their thoughts and opinions (Barbour, 2007). Most importantly, an interview setting where young people are grouped together with peers and/or friends can allow for some adolescents to feel more comfortable opening-up about their perspectives. Being in an interview alongside peers can also help reduce power imbalances that can occur between a researcher and young participants in one-to-one interviews (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Furthermore, the group dynamic and interactions between adolescent participants can also be key to understanding their overall viewpoints on a topic/issue (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Although individual interviews have been known to provide a safer and more confidential space for young people to talk about sensitive subjects, the facilitative benefits of group interactions were seen as more advantageous than the strengths of one-to-one interviews; and there for, focus groups were chosen (Heary & Hennessy, 2006).

Each participant attended two focus group interviews to allow the researcher and students time to get to know one another and build rapport and trust. This also provided additional time for students to become acquainted with how a focus group works and to become accustomed to sharing their views in group discussions. Swartz (2011) highlights the unique ethics of carrying out research with young people and children and argues that young people's participation should not be facilitated in a solely research-focused, transactional manner without considering their needs and preferences in the research process (i.e. what they would benefit from in the research and/or their learning needs). The first focus group consisted of rapport-building activities and sessions on how focus groups and creative brainstorming work. Although data from the first focus group has not been included in this study, details from it have been included in this write-up to show readers the complete interviewing process, and how participants learned how to partake in a focus group. Outlining all the data collection steps can allow for a transparent and thorough

description of the research process; ensuring the quality of the study can be fairly evaluated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second focus group consisted of an exploration of participants' views on the research topic through group discussions and collage art.

A total of twelve focus group interviews were carried out for this study. Six groups were formed across the three participating schools for the focus group interviews (each participating school had two research groups). Guidance counsellors and year heads divided participating students into two groups in each school to ensure the focus groups consisted of small groups of participants (10 participants or less). Each participant took part in two focus group interviews. The focus group interviews were 2 hours long in duration and they were held between April 24th, 2023 and May 22nd, 2023 in a private classroom or assembly space at participants' post-primary schools. Focus group 1 and focus group 2 were held one week apart for all schools. Furthermore, each focus group was carried out and moderated by two facilitators: the researcher plus another postgraduate student or one of the researcher's academic supervisors.

The focus groups followed a topic guide of open-ended questions to support discussions on the topic of young people's definition of cyberbullying (Focus group 1) and young people's views on school support for victims of cyberbullying (Focus group 2) (Adler et al., 2019; Krueger, 2014). The first focus group concentrated on rapport-building and showing participants what focus groups involve. The format of the first focus group interview was as follows:

1. Part 1 consisted of introductions, ice-breaker games and devising and reviewing focus group guidelines.
2. Part 2 involved an introduction to how focus groups work and an introduction to collage art and creative brainstorming.
3. Part 3 consisted of a creative brainstorming workshop where participants explored what cyberbullying means to young people their age through collage art or a mind map. This workshop involved a mixture of collage making and writing to enable participants to have a private space to brainstorm and reflect on their perspectives and experiences (Adler et al., 2019; Elizabeth, 2008; Hennessy & Heary, 2005; Krueger, 2014).
4. Part 4 consisted of a group discussion (30-45 minutes) on young people's collage art or mind map and their definition of cyberbullying. A set topic guide, consisting of four open-ended questions, was used to elicit participants' views

in this group discussion (p. 93, Appendix B). This topic guide explored examples of cyberbullying and what the term means to young people.

The second focus group focused on investigating participants' views on school support for victims of cyberbullying). The format of this focus group was as follows:

1. Part 1 consisted of an ice-breaker game, a review of common group guidelines and checking in with participants about their thoughts and feelings about the last focus group interview.
2. Part 2 consisted of a brain-storming session using mind maps. Notes and/or drawings were carried out to help participants explore their views on school support for victims of cyberbullying and education and prevention measures used in schools to tackle cyberbullying. A topic guide of eight questions was given to them before the brainstorming session to help guide the exploration of their views (p. 95, Appendix B).
3. Part 3 consisted of a 45-minute discussion on students' views of the research topic and thoughts from their notes/drawings. Eight open-ended questions (p. 96, Appendix B) were used to help open-up a discussion amongst participants.
4. Part 4 consisted of a group discussion on three different cyberbullying vignettes. These vignettes were based on common cyberbullying problems that young people face and suggestions made by the youth advisory group. Participants reviewed each vignette as a group and were asked to share their thoughts on what would best support or help the victim in each scenario. The vignettes and questions can be found on p. 99, Appendix B. This discussion lasted for 30 minutes.

Materials

The first interview was led by a topic guide of open-ended questions that investigated young people's perspectives on different aspects of school support for cyberbullying victims (i.e. staff involved in support, education programs, counselling support). The second interview involved the use of three cyberbullying vignettes and open-ended questions to explore participants' views on the types of school support needed for different kinds of cyberbullying incidents. A vignette can be defined "as a short hypothetical account

reflecting real- world situations" (Tremblay et al., 2022, p. 1). Vignettes were used in this study to sensitively elicit young people's views on the support needed for cyberbullying victims (Tremblay et al., 2022). The use of fictional accounts allowed for a more distant and safe exploration of the support victims might need in different scenarios, without directly asking participants about their potential, real experiences as victims or bystanders. Although it is likely that some of the participants have engaged in cyberbullying behaviour, the research question centred on support for victims of cyberbullying in post-primary school. This study did not include a vignette depicting a cyberbully's experience as it sought to concentrate on exploring adolescents' perspectives on school support for victims to thoroughly investigate the latter research topic.

The vignettes were based on cyberbullying issues found to be common among young people (Gohal et al., 2023). Sharing personal/intimate images or videos, online defamation, and anonymous forms of bullying (i.e. nasty comments posted) are typical forms of cyberbullying that adolescent victims experience (Gohal et al., 2023). The first vignette depicted the inappropriate alteration and sharing of a student's personal photo via WhatsApp. The second vignette depicted peer exclusion and cyberbullying through anonymous messages sent on Facebook. Lastly, the third vignette depicted the use of fake videos to misrepresent and defame a student. The youth PPI group helped evaluate the vignettes to ensure they reflect young people's experiences of cyberbullying and they helped develop the narrative for the third vignette.

In addition, collage art was used to support participants in the first focus group to brainstorm their ideas and perspectives on cyberbullying and prepare them for their first group discussion on the topic. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) claim that integrating art in qualitative research instruction can strengthen students' understanding of the process and ability to carry it out. The qualitative inquiry learning experience often involves affective and experiential components and art can help facilitate these learning stages (Cooper et al., 2012).

Analysis

Reflexive TA can be defined as a form of thematic analysis that values and involves critical reflection on the part of the researcher(s) throughout the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This form of TA recognises the subjective stance of researcher(s) and calls for researchers to maintain an awareness of their views

and self and how these may influence the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive TA was selected over other analytic methods, such as IPA or narrative analysis, as its analytic approach is more flexible and aims to produce more generalised findings than the in-depth and idiographic approaches akin to IPA and narrative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maitlis, 2012; Smith et al., 2022). Its approach aligns with this study's aims of investigating young people's general perspectives on school support for victims of cyberbullying. Inductive TA is grounded in the data and adopts a bottom-up approach to analysis; beginning with the data to develop themes and possible theories as opposed to drawing on existing theory and research to guide the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

All twelve focus group recordings were automatically transcribed using HappyScribe's AI transcription services. Subsequently, the transcripts were manually reviewed and edited to ensure transcription accuracy and to anonymise the data. To focus on answering this study's principal research questions, only focus group 2 interview transcripts (six transcripts) were analysed and used. The focus group transcripts were manually coded. This process "encourage[d] a slower and more meaningful interaction with the data" and allowed for "great freedom in terms of constant comparison, trailing arrangements, viewing perspectives, reflection and ultimately developing interpretative insights" (Maher et al., 2018, p. 11). Manual coding was selected to cultivate a deeper familiarisation with the data and a more meaningful analysis.

Braun and Clarke's six phase reflexive thematic analysis guide (2022) was drawn on to analyse the transcripts. The analytic process began with familiarisation with the data, where all six transcripts were first read and reviewed twice. During this part of the first phase, I noted my initial impressions, reactions, and observations. This first step enabled me to engage with participants' perspectives and identify any group dynamics or issuesthat arose that needed to be taken into consideration in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Next, I reviewed the data in further depth to make notes and observations about the data set as a whole; identifying potential patterns of meaning across the set and any questions about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Here, I noticed the emphasis many participants placed on their relationships with staff and how the quality of their relationships with staff affected their ability to open-up to them about cyberbullying issues/incidents. Although I asked participants about the types of support available for cyberbullying victims at school and staff who are available to support victims, they tended

to talk about their relationships to staff (i.e. trust, staff's ability to support them) when describing forms of support. Engaging with potential patterns of meaning and taking note of interesting aspects of the data at this preliminary stage helped me adopt a critical mindset for the coding phases (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Following the familiarisation stage, all six transcripts were systematically coded. The first coding phase involved dividing transcript texts into various *codes*. A code can be described as a label/name given to speech or text that represents a singular idea or meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Braun and Clark, 2022). Coding was only completed for speech that was relevant to the research questions. Additionally, both semantic and latent coding were carried out to identify surface level and underlying data meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For example, participants' use of certain language to describe support for victims (i.e. staff 'sorting out' cyberbullying incidents for students) in parts of the focus groups appeared significant and thus were categorised as 'semantic' codes. The use of the word 'sort out' to describe staff's support of victims seemed to, however, also possess meaning beyond its surface level description (e.g. implying staff's skills in supporting victims helps gain students' trust); and was thus also categorised as a latent code. In the first round of coding, semantic forms of coding were primarily carried out. Whereas, more latent forms of coding were carried out in the second round, where I brought descriptive codes beyond their surface-level meaning and sought to identify any deeper meaning/ideas behind them (Braun and Clarke, 2013). After the transcripts had been fully coded, all codes and their related texts were reviewed to ensure the codes sufficiently reflected participants' views (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Coding was completed on Word Document files, with transcripts placed on the left side of the page and codes and initial observations typed on the right side of the page and/or directly under speech segments. An example can be found on p. 101, Appendix C.

After the coding stage, I sought to identify themes from the codes by exploring similarities, differences and general patterns across the codes and whole data set (Vaimoradi et al., 2016). Themes can be defined as patterns that encapsulate something significant about the data, and which pertain to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2022). They normally need to capture a large range of data that are connected by and evidence a shared idea/concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While codes usually represent a single aspect of an idea or concept, themes represent multiple facets of an idea or concept (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Vaimoradi et al., 2016). In searching for patterns of meaning

across the data, I compared and examined all the codes to discern whether they share underlying concepts, ideas, or meanings.

After this first phase of theme generation, I devised a list of six candidate themes. However, these themes proved to be more descriptive than conceptual in nature after reviewing them; thus, I returned to the data set to reconfigure the themes. Reflexive TA is often a recursive process where researchers need to backtrack and/or change course in the theme generation process to refine and identify core themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Overall, I revisited the data and refined the themes four times before reaching a final set of themes. The themes finalised in round 4 of the theme generation process captured central patterns and ideas across the data and enabled me to tell a coherent story to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Each theme represented a key concept from participants' overall views on support for victims of cyberbullying in post-primary school.

After finalising the themes, I reviewed the entire data set to ensure the themes could be supported by the data (i.e. interview extracts) and if /how other parts of the focus group interviews could also provide evidence for the themes. This revision enabled me to check the quality of the data analysis, by allowing me to verify whether all final themes had a central organising concept and whether conceptually stronger and/or more representative themes could be identified from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The last stage in the analytic process involved a deeper refining of the themes. I finalised each theme's name and central organising concept and I also outlined the unique qualities of each theme. Lastly, I reviewed how each theme contributes to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Trustworthiness and Research Quality

The trustworthiness of this study was maintained and evaluated using the four main criteria outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and Braun and Clarke's (2021) guideline on research quality for reflexive thematic analysis. To ensure credibility or the effective application of reflexive TA, this study drew on the support of my academic supervisors throughout the analytic process (i.e. from coding to theme generation) to ensure the data analysis was completed in a rigorous manner and met the standards of reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). Moreover, the transferability of the study - the ability of the study to be used

in or applied to other related studies - was achieved by maintaining a thorough description of the research and analytic process. An accurate and transparent description of the research process can enable other researchers to discern whether the study's findings can be used in other studies, reviews, or reports (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Similarly, transparency was also achieved through maintaining an awareness of researcher assumptions and beliefs that could influence the analysis. This was accomplished through reflexive notetaking throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun & Clarke (2021) emphasise the need for reflexivity and an outline of how the researcher's biases and background impact on the analytic process to ensure research quality. In order to ensure the overall quality or dependability of the study, the research process was clearly outlined, logically organised, and consisted of traceable stages to ensure transparency for evaluations by other researchers. In addition, the data analysis was thoroughly carried out to ensure the final themes were conceptual in nature and consisted of multi-faceted ideas as opposed to single ones (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Ensuring the theme generation process captured overarching and complex patterns in the data helped strengthen the study's quality. Lastly, the confirmability or quality of results was achieved by ensuring the findings, interpretations and conclusions were grounded in and supported by the data (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was not required for the PPI research carried out with school staff and students, as outlined by The Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in Research and Research Ethics Committee Review Statement provided by the UK Health Research Authority and INVOLVE (Health Research Authority & Involve, 2016). In line with PPI research ethics and guidelines, results from the PPI component of this study have not been included in any published works and measures were taken to ensure PPI meetings solely focused on members' views of the research materials and process and not their views on the study's research topic (Grundy et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2018).

Strong measures were taken to ensure and protect participants' wellbeing throughout the research process due to the sensitive nature of the study's topic and the involvement of adolescent participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). A distress protocol was developed in the event participants felt unwell or experienced distress during the focus

groups (p. 97, Appendix B). Moreover, a dedicated support person (i.e. guidance counsellor or year head) was identified in each school to be available for support if needed during and after the focus groups. In addition, contact details for free counselling/mental health support were given to young people and their parents via the information sheets in the event support was needed during or after research participation. Participants and their parents were also made aware that the interview facilitators would be available during and after the focus groups for support. We worked together to ensure participants were placed with at least 1-2 peers or friends with whom they have a good relationship and that participants were not placed in the same research group as other participants with whom they have had severe conflict. Equally, this study focused on young people's general perspectives on school support for victims of cyberbullying to allow participants the choice of drawing on their own personal experiences or not; ensuring triggering topics were not forced upon young people (Alderson et al., 2019). Participants were also made aware that they could refuse to discuss certain topics and refuse participating in discussions at any time.

Additionally, students and their parents were advised through the information sheets about the study's terms of confidentiality and anonymisation of data (i.e. information that could identify participants were removed or anonymised) (p. 123, Appendix E). They were advised of the limitations to confidentiality and that confidentiality would need to be breached if it were known during the focus groups that a participant was at risk of harm or at risk of harming another person. Lastly, they were advised of the potential limitations of confidentiality after participating in the focus groups (i.e. the potential for other participants within the group to reveal what was discussed with others outside of the group) and were advised to only share what they felt comfortable sharing/discussing in a group setting. To further ensure confidentiality after the data collection, personal information was stored electronically via The University of Galway's OneDrive. Hard copy information (i.e. consent forms) was secured in a locked filing cabinet, and identifying information was stored separately from anonymised data. All data from the study will be destroyed seven years from the conclusion of the study.

Overall, there were no known risks to the researcher's and facilitators' wellbeing or safety from conducting this study. Data was collected through focus group interviews and the focus groups were facilitated by postgraduate researchers enrolled at the University of Galway. All focus group facilitators were garda vetted and were given an

overview of the safeguarding protocol and focus group plan before the research commenced.

The focus group interviews were audio-recorded to enable transcription and analysis. Transcriptions were conducted by a professional transcription company used by the university, who are obliged to abide by data confidentiality agreements. They were first transcribed by HappyScribe's AI transcription services; and afterwards, I reviewed each recording and ensured the transcriptions were correctly and fully transcribed. There were some errors in the transcriptions completed by HappyScribe and I reviewed each transcription and recording to ensure errors were corrected. Transcripts were assigned a study ID number to maintain anonymity, and any information linking participants to the data were removed from transcripts and pseudonyms inserted. A password protected file stored separately from the interview transcripts contains participants' study ID number, participants' age, gender, name and contact details to ensure that interview transcripts are identifiable only to the research team and can be made available to the interviewee upon request. Data is being stored securely, and separately from the identification code key, on the University of Galway OneDrive. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the data will be retained for no longer than is necessary for the purpose of this project.

Reflexivity

Overall, I believe my views on adolescent development have impacted the research process, including the development of the research question, data collection, and data analysis, to a degree. With a background in social sciences, I believe a young person's social and cultural environment largely affects their learning and growth. My views are reflective of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) main theory on socio-ecological development. I am a firm believer that various aspects of a person's environment interact with one another to shape a person. To maintain an awareness of personal biases and assumptions that could skew the study, I kept up a reflexive stance throughout the different research stages. Notes were taking during each part of the research to keep track of my various ideas and emotions to prevent them from completely colouring the data analysis and results.

Results

Theme 1: Trusting relationships with school staff and trustworthy systems of school support

This theme outlines the importance of *trusting relationships with school staff and trustworthy systems of school support for cyberbullying victims* in helping students (ages 13-15) feel supported when faced with cyberbullying. Students expressed that they need to be able to trust staff and the systems of support for victims at school to feel comfortable using support services and asking for help. They highlighted aspects of support systems and relationships with staff that prevent trust from being built (i.e. lack of emotional support) and their needs from being met. Young people claimed that support systems need to meet victims' core needs (i.e. confidentiality) better and consider the emotional effects of cyberbullying on victims to strengthen young people's trust in schools.

Theme 1 has been divided into four sub-themes: a) *Staff who care about us and who invest their time to support us* b) *Relatable staff that understand our problems and cyberbullying*, c) *Reporting and support seeking systems that meet and respect our needs and sense of safety/wellbeing,* and *d) Making sure bullies/cyberbullies learn a lesson.* These sub-themes reflect how trusting relationships with staff and trustworthy support systems aid post-primary school students (victims and bystanders) in receiving the help they need when confronted with cyberbullying.

Sub-theme 1.1: Caring Relationships - Staff who care about us and who invest their time to support us

Trusting relationships with school staff appear to be a necessary base from which students can fully open-up about cyberbullying issues. Several students explained that victims would confide most in staff they trust about the details of a cyberbullying incident: "…sometimes if it's really bothering you, you can go talk to the principal and you don't have to be too specific if you don't really want to... Then they tell the year head and then the year head would kind of get into a little bit more detail because you kind of have more trust with your year head..." (p. 105, Appendix D) Having trust in staff's ability to help victims seems critical in supporting students to seek help when cyberbullying occurs.

In exploring students' views on their relationships with staff, it is apparent that staff's ***care*** for victims and their care for the issue of cyberbullying is essential to building

trust. Students define *care* as staff's emotional support of victims (i.e. ability to listen to and take an interest in young people's problems) and staff's efforts and skills in helping victims to resolve interpersonal issues related to cyberbullying. Furthermore, many participants emphasised a need for consistent support and adequate time to get to know staff to feel cared for. This next section will examine how different aspects of staff care help cultivate trust between students and staff.

According to students, staff demonstrating their care for them through various forms of support (i.e. emotional) is inherent to helping them feel supported and subsequently earning their trust. In response to a question on types of support that would be fundamental to helping victims, young people stressed that having a member of staff help one through or stop a cyberbullying problem is vital: "Like someone to help you through it like and like to help make sure they stop bothering you and stuff..." (p. 106, Appendix D). They also outlined the importance of consistent emotional support from staff after an incident: "Yeah like [staff] checking in with you now and again to make sure you're okay" (p. 106, Appendix D). Having a member of staff by one's side to help one through the emotional challenges was viewed by students as paramount to helping victims.

Moreover, it is evident that staff's good will and intentions to help victims is of equal importance to conveying their care and gaining students' trust. Across several focus groups, students discussed the negative and positive sides of school assemblies as a forum to address cyberbullying issues. While some students argued assemblies can expose victims and render them vulnerable to further bullying, other students asserted that, despite their drawbacks, assemblies are helpful as it demonstrates to students that staff care about them and view their problems seriously: "...it always helps that people care about them" (p. 106, Appendix D). It seems that having visible intentions and efforts to support victims can alone help students feel cared for; facilitating students to trust and feel comfortable seeking support when needed despite flaws in the systems of support.

Conversely, a lack of care from staff can dissuade victims from seeking support when it is needed. A number of students expressed that some staff would not care about the problems they encounter. They claimed certain staff's more careless approach to dealing with cyberbullying issues can worsen circumstances for victims. Some students explained that teachers may embarrass or leave victims vulnerable to further bullying if they address incidents in an insensitive manner: "Teachers, you talk to the teacher, but a lot of the times when we do… They either don't care or it ends up worse because either the bullying gets

worse because you told the teacher, or the teacher makes it worse by either embarrassing you or by not taking you seriously...” (p. 111, Appendix D). Staff perceived as uncaring seem to be less trusted by students, negatively affecting their willingness to reach out for support.

In addition, caring staff can help build an essential bridge to reach more vulnerable students who have previously been bullied. Some students explained they had been victimised in primary school and had negative experiences of support by school staff: “... I'm talking from experience, but a lot of us didn't have good experiences talking about bullying in primary school. I was getting bullied by a girl, and I told the teacher, and I ended up getting in trouble instead...” (p. 111, Appendix D). As such, students with a history of bullying victimisation could be more reluctant to trust staff in post-primary school. Their potential prior experiences of victimisation and perception of poor school support underline a need for strong relationship building with staff. Ensuring trust is nurtured with students can help those with a history of victimisation regain trust in staff and schools. . This can help guarantee they feel safe enough to seek support when it is needed.

Some students also highlighted that a victim’s gender tends to affect the way staff demonstrate their care and thus the quality of care given. Students explained that the expectation for boys to be ‘tough’ and ‘less emotional’ than girls can lead to staff providing little to no support to male victims: “They feel like they’re dealing with it themselves. It happened to me before… Like I was getting bullied, and no one really cared. They’d tell us to deal with it ourselves (p. 116, Appendix D).” Students felt some staff can minimise bullying issues that boys experience as fighting and conflict between boys are seen as more normal behaviour. Simultaneously, gender expectations appeared to influence male victims’ willingness to reach out for support when cyberbullying occurs: “Most of the time, boys don’t want to say anything (p. 116, Appendix D).” Boys’ apparent different ways of expressing their emotions and dealing with problems paired with the perceived variations in staff responses to males who experience cyberbullying in comparison to females seems to translate to some male students not receiving help they need.

Furthermore, consistent support and relationship-building between staff and students also seems to hold considerable weight in nurturing trust. Students highlighted the importance of regular support sessions (i.e. with chaplains) and assemblies (i.e. held by year-heads) in helping young people feel supported and safe enough to open up about

cyberbullying incidents. Several students asserted that they could benefit from more support sessions with staff: "…Our chaplain brought us out to talk to us just to see how we're getting on, [and] that could be done more" (p. 109, Appendix D). They explained that support sessions with the chaplain are only occasional during the year. Equally, some students pointed out that more assemblies on the issue of cyberbullying could be held: "They only call assemblies when somebody's told them that cyberbullying has happened. Maybe if they did it more often and somebody didn't really want to confess to the teachers yet because they were like too shy to, then the teachers might get to know [them and that might change]" (p. 109, Appendix D). They believed that some students may be too timid to tell teachers they are being bullied if assemblies are sporadic. Some students suggested that more frequent assemblies can help students become better acquainted with staff; facilitating them to feel more at ease reporting incidents. Students seem to believe that regular support is needed to solidify trust and a safe space for young people to talk about issues they experience as they occur; ensuring cyberbullying victims receive support with fewer barriers and delays.

Having time to get to know staff appears to also be key to building trust. In response to a question about why some students do not feel comfortable confiding in staff at their post-primary school, some students stated, "In secondary school, we only been with them (teachers) for a year. In primary school, we were with them for, like six, eight years. So we feel more comfortable to talk to them..." (p. 108, Appendix D) Several students also said they would feel more comfortable opening-up to their parents than teachers if they were being cyberbullied, as they know their parents better than teachers (p. 107, Appendix D). Although this may differ for students who do not have a close relationship with their parents, it indicates a need for staff to invest time in getting to know students. This can help earn students' trust and build the rapport needed for them to feel comfortable reaching out for help at school.

Lastly, staff initiative and skills in supporting victims are also central to cultivating trust. According to students, taking initiative means trying to respond to victims' needs and putting a stop to cyberbullying. Whereas skills in supporting victims means being adept at helping victims recover/cope. Several students claimed that staff taking action to help stop cyberbullying facilitates victims to trust their pastoral care skills and reach out for help when it is needed: "…Sometimes when someone's being bullied, it might affect their mood and stuff. So, if they go to a teacher, they'd know that the teacher is

going to do something about it to make them feel better afterwards" (p. 107, Appendix D). In response to a question on who students would open-up to at school, most said they would choose to speak to their chaplain over other staff because "If something happens, [they] can go to her and she'll, like, sort it out" (p. 106, Appendix D). This indicates that staff's skills in dealing with cyberbullying problems are equally crucial to forging trust with students. Many students described staff they would confide in as capable of 'sorting out' cyberbullying issues. This pattern of students stating they would open-up to staff who can help resolve cyberbullying issues indicates a link between students' ability to trust staff and the training, knowledge, and expertise that staff have in cyberbullying intervention and prevention strategies (p. 105 & 106, Appendix D).

Sub-theme 1.2: Relatable staff that understand the nuances of cyberbullying and its impact on victims

In addition to caring relationships, school staff's knowledge of cyberbullying and their understanding of how it affects victims also appears to be vital in gaining students' trust and supporting victims to reach out for help. Throughout the study, students indicated that there is often a divide between victims' experiences of cyberbullying and staff's understanding of the issue. They asserted that a poor understanding of victims' experiences greatly impacts staff's pastoral care skills and staff's limited skills often dissuade victims from seeking support. Some students stressed that many staff fail to grasp the complexities of cyberbullying and the interpersonal issues related to it. They highlighted a need for staff to be more up to date with young people's social media use (i.e. apps) and for them to improve their understanding of how technology shapes young people's ways of communication and relationships.

A deficit in skills seems to translate to support that falls short of tackling the root of most cyberbullying problems. A few students explained they would be reluctant to confide in staff as many tend to view and approach resolving incidents in a superficial manner: "Usually, the conclusion is to say sorry to each other, which usually doesn't work" or "They're like shake hands now. If it happens again, then come to me, and then when it happens again... Oh, don't worry (p. 117 & p. 119, Appendix D)." They seemed to hint at the need for deeper forms of support that can help with conflict resolution and peer issues. Several students also pointed to the moral aspect of cyberbullying that staff frequently overlook: "Social media can be fine. It can be a great place to share your feelings, share

pictures with your friends and stuff. But it can also have its bad things, but it's people that make it bad not the actual app (p. 117, Appendix D).” They seemed to suggest that support and prevention measures need to turn their attention to young people’s interpersonal and empathy skills rather than their technology use to combat cyberbullying.

Having good knowledge of social media apps and current online culture also appears to be important in earning students’ trust and encouraging victims to reach out for support. Many students expressed that they feel more comfortable opening-up to staff who understand and are up to date with young people’s preferred apps (i.e. TikTok). One student explained that they preferred to confide in one teacher as: “She had Snapchat, and she knew more – you could relate to her. She knew what was popular in that (p. 113, Appendix D).” Meanwhile, some students described a preference for external facilitators over school staff in educating students on online safety, as they tend to be better versed in social media: “…they actually know what they're talking about (p. 113, Appendix D).” Staff’s social media knowledge seems to strengthen their credibility as adults who can understand and help victims. Being able to relate to young people and their struggles also appears to help staff connect to and build relationships with them.

On top of needing to understand how young people use current social media. Students across this study also outlined the need for staff to understand the interpersonal and communication nuances that are unique to cyberbullying: “… an entire culture which has been cultivated by the Internet, which you don't really understand unless you've been on the internet for a long time. Again, things can be taken out of context with things that sound worse, or things can sound not as bad, but they are (p. 119, Appendix D).” Several students acknowledged that it can be difficult to ascertain if an online act/comment is a form of bullying and that adequate knowledge of the online world is needed to navigate these grey areas. Some also explained that a lack of accountability for what is said online can enable young people to be more tactless when expressing their views: “Because on the internet, people tend to be more vocal and say things that they wouldn't in real life… But for some people, it's okay. But if you take what they say out of context, [it would sound bad] (p. 119, Appendix D).” Although students agreed that the internet can allow for harsher forms of communication, they emphasised the necessity of understanding a comment’s context (i.e. a student’s background) in discerning whether bullying has occurred or not. They seemed to imply that an individual’s background (i.e. history of victimisation and social environment) can be determining factors. Understanding the

subtleties of cyberbullying appear to be one of the missing pieces that can help staff cultivate better trust with students and bolster victims' confidence in opening-up to them.

Students also underlined the need for staff to understand the limits in this area. As staff often struggle to comprehend victims' experiences and what their needs are, many students stressed they need to adopt a humbler stance in their support and treat victims as equals. Several students described a preference for confiding in staff who are "able to meet you eye-to-eye" and do not "act like [they're] higher than us (p. 112, Appendix D)" They indicated a need for staff to respect their agency and knowledge around problems that concern them. Staff behaving as though they know better than victims appears to negatively affect students' level of comfort opening-up to them. Moreover, some students claimed that the generational difference between young people and staff can also deter victims from seeking help: "I think it's mainly the age gap. You feel like you can't relate to them as much as they're in the past (p. 112, Appendix D)." Students seemed to suggest that, in order to build strong, trusting relationships with them, staff need to be more aware of young people's worldview and how generational gaps can impact their support of victims.

Sub-theme 1.3: Making sure punishment for cyberbullies match the behaviour - Ensuring cyberbullies learn a lesson and that the impact on victims is taken seriously

Parallel to students' concerns around staff's understanding of cyberbullying, young people across this study also expressed dissatisfaction with the kinds of consequences (i.e. suspension, phone bans) given to cyberbullies at school. They highlighted that school responses tend to also reflect a more one-dimensional understanding of cyberbullying and its impact on victims. Many students posited that common forms of punishment often lack what is needed to help cyberbullies understand the consequences of their actions and prevent further bullying. As such, students seemed to exhibit a sense of reluctance in reporting incidents at school and distrust in their school's ability in helping victims. It appears that punishment systems need further development to meet victims' and cyberbullies' needs (i.e. what cyberbullies need to stop harming others) and strengthen students' trust in systems of support at school.

To respond to a cyberbullying incident with the right form of consequence or intervention, students indicated that schools and staff first need to be able to recognise when cyberbullying or bullying has occurred. Although cyberbullying takes place online,

students pointed out that they are often connected to face-to-face peer issues and require staff to be able to identify in-person conflict that can spill-over online. They explained that staff can find it difficult to detect whether bullying has occurred; and as a result, few or no consequences are given to bullies: "…Oh, so you guys just say sorry…and it all [will] be all right'… That's actually a big issue, is that they don't take it really seriously. They just think it's something minor and that they'll be friends, maybe that they were just doing some dumb joke. Then that just makes the bully feel more secure… that he's not going to get in trouble… and the situation just gets out of hand (p. 117, Appendix D)." Students believed that many bullying and cyberbullying incidents go unnoticed or are downplayed, with bullies not given the consequences needed to stop their behaviour.

When cyberbullies are given consequences for their behaviour, students claimed that the types of interventions and punishment do not usually target the bullying behaviour carried out and can enable cyberbullies to continue harming others. Several mentioned that schools frequently give out detention or temporary suspensions to cyberbullies. They explained that using detention as a form of punishment can be problematic as cyberbullies are often indifferent to them and can avoid completing them: "Detention - people don't really care about detention. Half the time people don't show up to the room (p. 118, Appendix D)." Students also described suspension as being ineffective as cyberbullies often still have access to their phones and the internet during one: "They'd rather take the suspension than lose their phone for like two weeks (p. 118, Appendix D)." Simultaneously, some students pointed out that receiving a suspension can provide benefits rather than meaningful consequences: "…a lot of the people who will get suspended, they'll be happy to because they don't want to go to school in the first place (p. 118, Appendix D)." Although a few students argued that suspensions can be impactful as they can be put on young people's school records, most echoed a need for consequences that can teach cyberbullies lessons about empathy and accountability.

Some students asserted that the types of consequences used need to help cyberbullies understand the gravity of their actions to help them change: "I think along the lines of how you said it would scare children. I think that's kind of a good thing. The fact that you're not going to bully someone if you realise how badly it could affect them, if you realise the consequences of what you're doing, if you're kind of scared of what [might happen.] (p. 119, Appendix D)" Students seemed to believe that consequences given to bullies need to have an emotional impact on them and instill real concern around how their

behaviour can hurt others and their own reputation. A few students explained that “schools don’t really teach the effects of bullying on someone. They just teach how it occurs (p. 119, Appendix D).” They suggested that schools should talk to students about how bullying and cyberbullying affects victims to help them understand what it can do to someone. Students appeared to agree that consequences need to focus on teaching bullies about the serious emotional consequences of their behaviour and prioritise helping them improve their empathy for victims.

To ensure lessons from punishment given at school are fully learned, several students pointed out the importance of involving cyberbullies’ parents in the process: “When the parents talk to them about it, they care a bit more, they take up their phone or something, and then next time they think about it (p. 118, Appendix D).” Due to their close relationships with their children, students seemed to think that parents might be more successful than staff at helping cyberbullies understand the consequences of their behaviour. Young people might be more open to listening to their parents regarding difficult topics and parents can also make sure phones are confiscated if necessary. A few students also posited that parents could play a key role in ensuring their children learn a lesson during a suspension: “Even so, it wouldn’t feel much different from the suspension because you’re sitting in the classroom. If you’re going home, then obviously your parents are going to punish you somehow (p. 118, Appendix D).” Students appeared to believe that parents’ usual responsibility over their children’s behaviour and moral education can help guarantee that cyberbullies undergo some consequences.

Sub-theme 1.4: Reporting and support seeking systems that meet and respect our needs (i.e. safety and wellbeing)

Alongside the need for more effective interventions that focus on helping cyberbullies develop better empathy skills, students emphasised that young people’s safety and privacy also need to be met across support systems to earn their trust. Many students expressed that they would not feel comfortable seeking support or reporting a cyberbullying incident at school as guidance counsellors/teachers often breach students’ confidentiality by speaking to other staff about incidents. Moreover, common routes to support do not always foster the privacy and anonymity needed for victims and bystanders to safely signal cyberbullying has occurred. A lack of regard for young people’s needs seems to reduce students’ trust in support systems and the staff who manage them;

impeding them from reaching out for support when it is needed. Students appeared to indicate that refining support systems to meet victims' needs better can help restore and nurture trust between students and schools.

Most students believed that being able to covertly ask for help facilitates a safe pathway to support for victims at school. Covert means of seeking support can help protect a victim or bystander's identity, helping them avoid issues with or further bullying from peers. Some students explained that peers often judge classmates and view them as 'snitches' if they see them go over to the chaplain's office to talk: "… if you're seen going into like the office and stuff, like rumours are started and people are all talking about it... Then everyone's like…why were you in there...What was that about? Then people eventually find out and you get a bad reputation (p. 117 & 118, Appendix D)." Several students, who claimed they felt uneasy about reaching out to staff for support, suggested that online platforms can be used to help victims privately report an incident: "If there was a place to tell a teacher about it online… it'd be good because usually you have to go in person, so people usually see you talking to that teacher. They can guess what you're doing (p. 117, Appendix D)"

Some students stated that using the Teams app on their phone to communicate with staff about bullying issues helps safeguard their privacy and encourages them to speak out about problems (p. 105, Appendix D). Safe and private ways of confiding in staff seem to help cement students' trust in systems of support at school. Similarly, students argued that anonymous reporting systems (i.e. suggestion boxes or emails) are also essential to helping victims and bystanders feel safe when reporting incidents (p. 117 & 118, Appendix D). Many students explained that not needing to disclose one's name/identity when making a report can encourage students to speak out. They suggested that victims may feel more comfortable telling staff about a cyberbully if they can make a report without revealing their own identity: "Maybe someone doesn't want people to know that they're getting bullied (p. 117, Appendix D)." Students seemed to believe that young people can feel ashamed about being victims of cyberbullying and that anonymous reporting can make the hard task of reaching out for help more feasible. Furthermore, some students recommended anonymous reporting as a discreet way for bystanders to disclose incidents and help put a stop to cyberbullying: "if someone's like getting bullied online and one of the classmates find out and they want to report it, they can like write a note to like the guidance counsellors anonymously. They don't have to put their name at

all (p. 116, Appendix D).” Students also claimed that anonymous reporting can make it easier for bystanders to report incidents where one of their friends has been involved: " Like, say if it was their friend who was cyberbullying someone, someone might not want to admit that they're doing it because they don't want to ruin their friendship. There should be like an anonymous way... so they won't know that it was you. Because like you might really care about that friendship... you might not want to lose it (p. 117, Appendix D).” They implied that this could help protect bystanders’ friendships and wellbeing at school while encouraging them to voice their concerns. Being able to anonymously report incidents appears to enhance students’ sense of safety around speaking out about cyberbullying.

The manner in which reported incidents are handled by staff and schools also seems to be paramount in building trust with young people. Several students cited that a lack of guaranteed confidentiality when confiding in staff is a major factor that can dissuade victims from reporting incidents. They highlighted that school policies often require staff to break confidentiality and report incidents they are aware of to their superiors: “They kind of have a duty to report everything to the year head and the tutors and like the principal. Nothing’s really confidential... (p. 114, Appendix D)” Some students hinted that school policies frequently disregard young people’s agency over their own issues and disclosures. They stated that staff often tell victims’ parents about incidents, for example, without consulting them: “What they usually do in schools is if you report something that's serious, what they do is they just tell your parents even if you don't want them to know (p. 114, Appendix D).” Students indicated that they should have a say on how confidentiality is managed and how counsellors liaise with other adults to support them. They also asserted that young people’s needs around how disclosures are handled need to be incorporated into support systems better. They suggested that guidance counsellors/chaplains need to ensure a level of confidentiality when victims confide in them and clearly outline the terms for it before support is given: “They could be like signing an agreement for them not to tell the year head unless it was like something that was really like, that could affect you or could harm you... (p. 114, Appendix D)” Overall, many students felt that terms of confidentiality for cyber-victimisation disclosures need to be revised to meet victims needs better. Ensuring young people’s voices are included in policy changes on confidentiality appears to be crucial in improving support systems for victims and supporting them to reach out for help when it is needed.

Theme 2: The importance of peer support in the aftermath of cyberbullying

This theme describes the numerous benefits of peer support in helping victims of cyberbullying recover in the aftermath of an incident. Parallel to claims from several students outlining a reluctance in confiding in school staff, many young people from this study expressed that they would prefer to be supported by friends, siblings, or peers if victimised. Students argued that friends can be a crucial link to support and can aid victims in getting the help they need: "You can go to your friends when you're against cyberbullying. It doesn't have to be cyberbullying. But if you are against cyberbullying, you can go to your friends, and they can help you get help (p. 122, Appendix D)" They also highlighted the importance of emotional support from friends and peers in helping victims overcome psychological challenges (i.e. loss of confidence) from having been cyberbullied. Equally, students stressed that peers play a vital role in bringing about justice for victims and resolving a cyberbullying incident/issue.

Sub-theme 2.1: Support from peers can help victims pull through

Students across the focus groups spoke about simple forms of emotional support from peers that can help lessen the negative effects of cyberbullying on victims. How peers treat classmates that have been cyberbullied appears to be paramount in helping them recuperate emotionally. Being sensitive to how victims might feel, showing them respect through one's words and actions, and caring for them seem to be essential components of peer support.

Several students suggested that peers can demonstrate a respect for and sensitivity towards victims by not talking about an incident: "I think it would help him if they just didn't talk about it and they just like moved on (p. 120, Appendix D)." They seemed to understand that discussing or gossiping about a cyberbullying incident with other classmates could make matters worse for a victim; with one student explaining, "Say if you're out with friends, to like not mention it, because Alex (vignette character) could get upset (p. 120, Appendix D)." Furthermore, a few young people pointed out that, despite the positive impact of peer support, victimisation can weaken an individual's social confidence and ability to connect with peers: "Probably like um emotional [support]. Like they might get sad, and it might be hard to be around friends. It might be a bit awkward

and embarrassing to be around them (p. 120, Appendix D).” They implied that this dip in self-esteem can impede victims from reaching out for support, but that emotional support from peers can help restore their sense of ease around classmates. Some students indicated that friends standing by a victim and establishing they have their back can help boost that person’s confidence at school, with students recommending: “People like vouch for him (referring to Terry from vignette 3) and say that they like him” or “People believe him (p. 120, Appendix D).” Having faith in a victim’s side of the story (i.e. when a social media post or shared video negatively portrays a victim) can show a young person that peers care for them and can help them feel less alone after an incident. Lastly, students underlined that peers can also help victims recover by reassuring them that any upset feelings will pass and that what was shared online (i.e. photo) is fake: “People reassuring him, that it’s okay… that’s just not real (p. 120, Appendix D).” They displayed an awareness of the power of peer support in helping victims prevail over psychological harm from having misinformation spread about them online.

Outside of emotional support from peers, students asserted that simply connecting with or making new friends can help victims heal and buffer the sense of isolation that can follow victimisation. Young people from this study primarily viewed friendships as having a positive influence on victims and their recovery process. In outlining forms of school support that Casey (character from Vignette 3) might need after being bullied on Facebook, students mentioned: “She might just want to have a friend that she could trust… so she can tell someone about this and they could like help her.” or “[she can] try to like make some friends (p. 122, Appendix D).” They hinted at victims being able to cope more easily in the company of friends and the importance of widening one’s friendship circle in getting support. Although friendship was prompted as a solution to Casey’s issue by the vignette’s description of them having few friends, students’ repeated focus on supportive friendships as a pathway to support for Casey highlights their belief in the potential of friendship in helping victims bounce back. A few students explained: “she obviously doesn't want to be friends with the people who are excluding her, I think she should stop trying to join their group and stuff and then find one or two people who don’t do that and make good friends with them. She could just ignore everyone else because she has friends (p. 122, Appendix D).” Students alluded to the resilience and strength that victims can get from good friendships, and how these can help minimise the unpleasant impact of perpetrators.

In discussing how peers and friends can be of aid to the victims portrayed in the vignettes, students indicated that school staff could play a vital role in helping them connect with peers/friends: “Maybe try to keep her like few friends close to her (p. 122, Appendix D).” Some students mentioned that staff could: “Teach her how to make friends or teach her how to ignore that (p. 122, Appendix D).” They suggested that staff could help some victims acquire the skills and confidence needed to reach out to other classmates and build new connections. Many students spoke about recreational activities that schools can run during and outside of class to help young build rapport with classmates and make friends: “Like in P.E., you could like mix the groups and like do activities outside of school. You mix the groups and find new friends (p. 122, Appendix D).” They alluded to the possible benefits of having young people work with peers who are different from them in helping them cultivate new friendships. A few students postulated that school-organised leisure and games can facilitate peer bonding and camaraderie through group activities: “…We did this thing where the whole year would be separated into groups of like, five or six, and then it'd be like a bonding experience where we play games together. It's not like you're in a room with 30 random people and you have to decide who to make friends with. You can connect to those six people and then it might be easier (p. 121, Appendix D).” They believed set activities comprising of small groups can provide the necessary structure to bring students together and help them connect with one another. Moreover, students recommended that schools could set up social meetups for young people who are struggling: “They could do what our school does. During the summer, there's like programs for students. We have a garden outside, so they just ask anyone who's finding it kind of tough to come in so they can like socialise with other people that are in the same situation as them (p. 121, Appendix D).” They implied that victims could find it helpful to meet others who have endured similar experiences/problems.

Sub-theme 2.2 – Peers can help get justice for victims

Students also perceived peers to be instrumental in reversing some of the harm caused by cyberbullying and bringing about justice for victims. In outlining the types of support that would be ideal for the vignette characters, students emphasised that peers deleting harmful online content, spreading ‘truths’ to counteract false rumours/information, and working together with other classmates to identify an aggressor are key in tackling cyberbullying and helping victims. Many young people stressed that

peers removing damaging or fake images/videos from their devices is a critical step in offsetting further harm to a victim and supporting them in recovering: "To say if they deleted the photo and then someone told him that the photo has been deleted, Alex might start to feel better (p. 122, Appendix D)." They believed that letting individuals know images/videos pertaining to them have been deleted is paramount to easing a victim's distress and helping them feel better.

Furthermore, several students outlined the importance of peers telling others (i.e. staff) the truth about a cyberbullying incident to correct any lies/misrepresentations perpetuated by an aggressor: "I think Terry would like his classmates to know that they didn't steal the watch. Like, if the person that like had the watch, told the teachers or something that no one stole the watch, and then everyone would like, kind of forget about it (p. 122, Appendix D)." Students insinuated that victims of fake videos (Vignette 3) may feel their reputations have been tarnished and they may also feel judged by classmates. They believed that peers stepping forward to give an honest account of an incident can help provide evidence that cyberbullying occurred: "Maybe showing the picture to someone, with someone like an adult and saying that someone tampered with it (p. 122, Appendix D)." Additionally, some young people suggested that peers can use social media to help undo damage caused by fake videos/images: "Maybe like getting his friends to post on their stories like it's fake and what the true story is, and maybe it gets shared across [social media] and then it'll die down (p. 121, Appendix D)." They inferred that peers' use of social media to challenge and rectify videos/images proliferated online could have a large-scale, positive impact and help victims get justice.

Several students also posited that peers could reveal to staff who may have been involved in an incident to help acquire justice for a victim: "So like say, you could tell them who might have done it (p. 122, Appendix D)." Equally, they argued that peers could work together to discern who cyberbullied/bullied a classmate. "People like banding together and people trying to find out who did it, who made the account (p. 121, Appendix D)." Students believed that peer efforts in identifying a perpetrator can help victims feel supported and less alone.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate young people's (aged 13-15) perspectives on school support for victims of cyberbullying in County Galway, Ireland. Two key themes were found across the data. The first theme, "Trusting relationships with school staff and trustworthy systems of school support," conveys how trust can be forged between students and staff and students and wider systems of support at school to help victims access support they need when faced with cyberbullying. Adolescents underscored the importance of caring relationships with staff in aiding victims to feel comfortable reaching out for help. They outlined that emotional support from staff and staff taking initiative to stop cyberbullying are essential to nurturing positive relationships with victims. Equally, students shed light on systems of support (i.e. punishment systems and reporting procedures for cyberbullying incidents) that often fail to meet cyber-victims' primary needs (i.e. confidentiality). They asserted that the latter hinders trust from being cultivated between adolescents and schools and impedes victims from seeking help. The second theme, "Peer support," relates to the power of support from peers and friends in helping cyber-victims recover and mend harm done to their self-esteem, reputation, and/or social life. It also focuses on young people's views on how schools can promote healthy rapport and connections among pupils and how staff can help victims acquire the skills needed to make new friends.

The first part of theme one, "Caring Relationships - Staff who care about us and who invest their time to support us," supports previous research on the importance of supportive relationships with school staff in helping victims deal with stressors and challenges from cyberbullying (Chun et al., 2021; Hellfeldt et al., 2020; Kowlaski et al., 2019; Pyzalski et al., 2022; Talwar & Nagar, 2023; Wachs et al., 2020; Zych et al., 2019). In outlining the types of support available in post-primary school, participants repeatedly outlined that being able to trust staff and having a good relationship with them are inherent to victims getting support they need when faced with cyberbullying. Trusting relationships with staff (i.e. teacher or chaplain) allows students to open-up more about cyberbullying problems. Conversely, a lack of trust in staff and their skills to intervene renders reaching out for support unfavourable. The central role of trust is similarly demonstrated in studies by Chan et al. (2020), Elledge et al. (2013), O'Moore (2012), Parris et al. (2012), Pelfrey and Weber (2015), and Pyzalski et al. (2022). Moreover, the value of one-to-one

relationships with staff mirrors the fundamental nature of proximal processes in young people's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Doty et al., 2024). Meaningful interactions with school staff can help young people grow and attain a level of emotional and social competence needed to cope with bullying and cyberbullying (Doty et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2020). Although research reveals that supportive and trusting relationships with adults at school are beneficial for cyber-victims (Hellfeldt et al., 2020; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Pyzalski et al., 2022; Zych et al., 2019), little is known about how these relationships can be built and sustained. This first sub-theme helps address the gap in the literature and illustrates how trusting relationships with staff can be developed.

Participants suggested that trust is nurtured between students and staff through staff's demonstration of their care for victims and the issue of cyberbullying. They postulated that staff's emotional support and their attempts to stop cyberbullying are crucial components of care. Research looking at adolescents' perspectives on forms of teacher support (i.e. House's (1981) forms of social support) for cyberbullying corroborate these findings and found that hypothetical emotional and instrumental (i.e. adults taking action to stop bullying) support from teachers predicted relief from cybervictimisation (Nagar & Talwar, 2023). A similar study by Boulton et al. (2013) also observed that past instrumental support provided by teachers for bullying incidents was a strong predictor of student disclosures. Despite differences that lie between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, participants showed a clear preference for relational forms of care in their accounts. This coincides with research that has found relational support for offline bullying to be effective in minimising cyberbullying involvement and behaviours (Nappa et al., 2021; Wachs et al., 2020). Simultaneously, participants drew attention to the power of staff intent in helping victims feel supported. They explained that staff's intentions to help and/or genuine care for victims hold more weight than the actual effectiveness of an intervention (i.e. the impact of using assemblies to investigate cyberbullying). Staff taking action can help establish that cyberbullying is unacceptable and that victims' wellbeing matter (Wachs et al., 2020).

In addition, participants also stressed the benefits of having staff monitor and work alongside victims to help them overcome difficulties related to cybervictimisation. This finding is consistent with recent research that shows having a warm relationship and regular communication with staff can protect students from cyberbullying and its effects (Chun et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2018; Ortega-Barton et al., 2016). Furthermore, emotional

support involving emotionally attuned staff aiding victims in processing difficult experiences has been shown to reduce perceived levels of traditional bullying among young people (House, 1981; Zeng et al., 2022). Students' belief that working through cyberbullying problems with trustworthy staff can be helpful also relates to research that has found a link between supportive teacher-student relationships, emotional regulation skills, and improvements in adolescent wellbeing (i.e. reduced anxiety and feeling supported) (Dietrich et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2022). Being able to talk about different emotional experiences with staff can help victims become more aware of their emotions and learn how to manage them (Dietrich et al., 2015). Moreover, these emotional regulation skills passed down to students through their close interactions with staff can be construed as a key proximal process that equips victims with the resources needed to make sense of and recover from cyberbullying.

In elaborating how support from staff could be ameliorated, participants recommended for more counselling sessions with the school chaplain and consistent cyberbullying prevention/intervention assemblies with staff (i.e. year head) and peers. They explained that routine and structured support throughout the year can ensure victims are provided a space to voice concerns and build rapport with staff. Research detailing the importance of having 'one trusted adult' in helping young people through adversity shows that relationship building over a length of time is essential to successful supportive relationships (Frederick et al., 2023; Pringle et al., 2019; Whitehead et al., 2019). Regular contact with staff can allow the time needed for trust to be formed; supporting more vulnerable or timid students in opening-up to them (Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Offiong et al., 2020). Participants also mentioned that some students have previously been bullied in primary school and consequently might possess a more unstable sense of trust. Consistency and care from staff can facilitate adolescents with a history of victimisation to restore their trust in adults at school and subsequently avail from supportive student-staff relationships.

Equally, participants brought to light that gender can play a pivotal role in the care provided to victims, with boys' cyberbullying reports often disregarded by staff. Tudge et al. (2016) underline that proximal processes are influenced by a young person's individual characteristics (i.e. skills, social identity) and that each victim's unique identity/background can shape their experience of cyberbullying and how adults around them respond. A few students asserted that there is an expectation for boys to manage cyberbullying problems themselves and that male victims tend to not open-up to adults about incidents. This is also

seen in research showing male victims are less likely to reach out to teachers and parents for support than their female counterparts (Betts et al., 2022; Chan & Wong, 2019; Dennehy et al., 2020; Hellfeldt et al., 2020; Sittichai & Smith, 2018). These findings paired with participants' views show that adults' different treatment of boys might reinforce certain behaviour in male victims and dissuade them from seeking help when needed. They suggest that staff should be aware that boys may not explicitly talk about cyberbullying issues and may need to be approached differently for them to feel at ease opening-up. Furthermore, this latter research also reflects the lack of issues girls have confiding in staff reported by participants across the study. Both female and male participants cited that girls tend to not face gender barriers to support.

Staff's skills in helping victims were also described by participants as critical to earning young people's trust. Students expressed that staff's limited knowledge of online contexts and the impact of cyberbullying on victims frequently acts as a barrier to students coming forward for help. Research looking at deterrents to young people reaching out to adults for support similarly uncovered that victims avoid confiding in teachers and parents due to their poor understanding of social media and the complexity of cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2013; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2009; Smith, 2012). Participants across the study explained that school personnel often make light of incidents presented to them, leading to unresolved cases and unsupported victims. Dennehy et al.'s findings (2020) support Dennehy reported that~~,~~ unless an incident was severe, participants tended to feel their disclosures at school were dismissed by staff. According to Sahin (2010), staff attitudes towards cyberbullying can highly affect victims' behaviour and ways of coping. This school microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) crucial to adolescents' learning and development can impinge on victims' ability to ask for help. A study by Blomqvist et al. (2020) found that students who believe their teachers would be intolerant of bullying are more likely to report an incident than students who believe their teachers would be tolerant of it. It seems that staff's awareness of the effects of cyberbullying on victims can greatly shape their attitudes towards bullying behaviour and subsequent responses to victims/disclosures.

To understand how cyberbullying affects victims, participants additionally underscored the need for staff to understand its nuances. Young people pointed out that online behaviour can be difficult to decipher, and that a fine line can divide jokes from more harmful comments/messages. They emphasised the importance of a young person's

context (i.e. social background, peer relationships, character) in determining whether online acts can be considered cyberbullying or not. This is consistent with recent research that found online conflict/aggression often lies on a spectrum for adolescents (Hawkins, 2023; Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020; Steer et al., 2020). Students claimed that unpleasant comments can sometimes be banter or friends joking around, but that malicious intentions or the impact that teasing has on a peer can turn jokes into a form of cyberbullying (Ranney et al., 2020; Steer et al., 2020). Conversely, they also acknowledged that harmful banter is often just thoughtless behaviour teenagers take part in to elevate their social status and bond with friends (Ranney et al., 2020; Steer et al., 2020). Careless and damaging comments have been shown to be common online due to perpetrators not being able to see the effects of their behaviour on peers (Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020).

The intention to harm or a lack of regard for others in distinguishing cyberbullying from banter indicate that relational issues can be a factor underpinning online aggression. This signals for staff to focus on understanding how peer interactions and conflict manifest online and to be cognisant of the potential for banter between adolescents to obscure underlying aggression. As studies show young people are hesitant about reporting less severe cyberbullying cases for fear of 'making a big deal' and troubling others (Daneback et al., 2018; Dennehy et al., 2020; Harger, 2019; Mishna et al., 2014), staff's awareness of the grey areas of cyberbullying can enable them to identify more subtle forms of it in discussions with students and provide support to victims who might normally be overlooked.

Furthermore, participants also voiced the need for staff to be more up-to-date with current social media apps, forums and games used by young people to become more competent in supporting victims. They expressed a strong preference for confiding in teachers and year-heads who are internet savvy and are aware of how adolescents use popular apps. This is corroborated by recent qualitative research that also found young people hold favourable views of school personnel who engage and take an interest in social media (Chan et al., 2020; Pyzalski et al., 2022). Students in Pyzalski et al.'s (2022) study spoke about the benefits of their teachers' and coaches' social media use and highlighted that they often use Facebook to interact with and support pupils (i.e. posting updates on school sports events or acting as a moderator for group wall chats). Whereas young people from Chan et al.'s (2020) research cited that counsellors' insufficient

knowledge of cyberbullying and online contexts leads to a disconnect in their relationships with students and can prevent victims from reporting incidents. Adolescents trust and relate better to staff who are well-versed in social media and common online problems experienced by young people. This insinuates that nurturing caring relationships with young people necessitates adults to possess a good grasp of their technology-shaped worlds and interactions.

Supportive student-staff relationships are also dependent on wider support systems within schools to be effective in helping victims. Cornu et al. (2022) emphasise that combatting cyberbullying and bullying involves multiple actors, including school policies and structures. Participants across the study frequently noted that reporting procedures and punishment systems for bullying and cyberbullying are not reflective of young people's primary needs. Students expressed they are often deterred from asking for help at school as their sense of safety, confidentiality, and agency are largely unaccounted for. They highlighted that incident reporting procedures rarely guarantee students' disclosures will be kept confidential, with staff (i.e. teachers) regularly sharing information about victims with colleagues without their consent. Dissatisfaction with the lack of confidential reporting processes and counselling support is also seen in research by Chan et al. (2020), Dennehy et al. (2020) and Pelfrey & Weber (2015). Some students also explained that staff's initial breach of confidentiality with colleagues can also lead to peers knowing about a victim's disclosure, threatening a victim's safety and privacy (Chan et al., 2020). Participants from this study indicated that pastoral forms of care tend to undermine adolescents' right to privacy and their agency around terms of confidentiality. They argued that young people should have the right to decide how information about them is handled; echoing research that shows adolescents' perspectives need to be understood and considered to produce effective cyberbullying interventions (Corby et al., 2015; Spears et al., 2011).

Reporting incidents can also place young people's social standing and peer relationships at risk. Participants outlined the need for discrete pathways to seeking support from school personnel (i.e. chaplains, guidance counsellors, teachers, etc..) as coming forward for help at school can reveal to peers that a young person may be struggling and/or flagging an issue. In the case it becomes known a victim has reached out for help, they may become vulnerable to judgment and mistreatment from peers. Adolescents in O'Brien et al.'s (2018) research similarly found it risky to report bullying

due to the potential negative social repercussions for telling on a classmate. Participants from this study also feared that calling out a bully as a victim or by-stander would lead to being excluded by classmates/friends or worse further punished by bullies, as mirrored in findings by Chan et al. (2020) and O'Brien et al. (2018). To protect pupils, they claimed that online apps, such as Teams, or anonymous suggestion boxes could be used to facilitate individuals to privately and safely communicate with staff about incidents. Witnesses to cyberbullying have been shown to only occasionally step up to defend victims due to the bystander effect (Patterson, 2017; Salmivalli et al., 2010) and peer conformity (Song & Oh, 2018). Discrete ways of reporting cyberbullying can help bystanders and victims voice their concerns without jeopardising their safety and friendships. Students in O'Moore's (2012) study also recommended anonymous suggestion boxes to support young people in speaking up about peer aggression. Moreover, Pyzalski et al. (2022)'s research discovered that students value staff's use of technology to connect with and help them. Apps, such as Facebook, can allow staff to conveniently and quietly intervene when cyberbullying occurs, akin to the use of Teams. Patel & Quan-Haase (2023) argue that digital contexts are intertwined with young people's development and thus affect different structures of support that shape their growth (i.e. communication with peers and adults).

The second theme "Peer support" conveys the importance of care from classmates and friends in helping victims recover emotionally from the negative social effects of cyberbullying. It also portrays the role of schools and staff in supporting students to build healthy friendships and peer connections. Overall, participants stressed the need for peers to explicitly demonstrate they vouch for victims (i.e. believe their side of the story) to show them they are supported in the aftermath of an incident. This coincides with several quantitative studies that show bystander peer interventions can help alleviate victim distress (Patterson et al. 2017; Slonje et al., 2013). Research indicates that bystanders' defense of victims can help halt bullying in about 60% of cases (Song & Oh, 2018). Peers can have a great influence on one another and classmates standing up for a victim can communicate to other students that the bullying behaviour is wrong and harmful, helping to stop aggression in its tracks. Not confined to dyadic relationships between victims and bullies, cyberbullying is a group process that involves many actors, in which bystanders can play a key role in ending bullying (Desmet, 2016; Salmivalli, 2010). Huang and Chui's (2024) study on different forms of social support and victim outcomes found that youth who have been bullied and who have been given a combination of care from stakeholders,

including support from both school mates and close friends, show the highest levels of subjective wellbeing. Whereas adolescents who reported being supported only by close friends had lower levels of wellbeing (Huang & Chui, 2024). Research equally highlights that youth who receive strong offline support from adults and peers alongside low online support fare better psychologically than those who receive an unclear mixture of online and offline care (Huang & Chui, 2024; Longest & Kang, 2022). Perhaps outward support from classmates can help change a peer group's view of a victim better than the more discrete help from friends, garnering more support for victims and curbing bullying. These findings relate to the importance that participants from this study placed on overt, in-person peer support in helping victims.

Several participants also explained that the victim experiencing exclusion in vignette 3 would likely feel lonely and suggested for them to keep away from aggressors and form new friendships. Exposure to cyberbullying has been shown to be strongly associated with loneliness (Brighi et al., 2012; Canas et al., 2020; Madsen et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2019). Existing studies have similarly found that bullying victimisation is connected to decreases in friend support, where victims are more likely to be rejected and unsupported by peers (Graham & Juvonen, 2001; Turanovic et al., 2023). Young people often avoid becoming friends with victims and occasionally sever bonds with them to protect their own social standing and prevent being targeted themselves (Boulton, 2013; Sentse et al., 2013; Turanovic & Young, 2016). The tendency for adolescents to distance themselves from victims can potentially exacerbate a person's sense of isolation and disconnection (Turanovic et al., 2023). Finding friends who are supportive can help victims feel less alone; bolstering their social confidence and reputation.

School initiatives/programs and staff are also instrumental in connecting victims to peers. Participants asserted that both could help victims acquire the skills needed to form healthy connections and friendships when struggling to reach out to same age mates. Zeng et al. (2022) found that high teacher and classroom support paired with offline contact with friends predicts lower levels of loneliness in adolescents. Teachers and other school personnel become increasingly important when students begin school and positive staff-student relationships are tied to good emotional functioning and connectedness at school (Pyzalski et al., 2022; Tennant et al., 2015). Given that adolescence is a time of immense learning and sensitivity, where youth's emotional and cognitive skills are still in development, scaffolding from staff can help individuals attain the competencies needed to

build good peer relationships (Sisk & Gee, 2022). Educators can be developmental guides, and can assist young people in honing various communication and conflict-resolution skills essential to their social wellbeing. Participants from this study claimed that school-run workshops/activities that help youth become acquainted with one another, make friends, and help fight social prejudices (i.e. racism) are paramount in facilitating victims to reconnect with peers and strengthen their self-esteem. These social education programs, a collaboration between staff and schools, can be seen as vital meso-system of support that helps adolescents gain resilience and the ability to cope with cyberbullying (Tudge et al., 2016).

To date, research has revealed that support systems for cyberbullying victims are often not aligned with young people's needs and require further training and a different approach on the part of school personnel (i.e. better knowledge of cyberbullying) (Chan et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020). In looking to young people's perspectives, this study has helped shed a light on what victims, aged 13-15, need the most to feel supported at school. Overall, it has found that improving access to support requires relationship building between students and staff; and that student-staff relationships are a crucial foundation from which young people can acquire skills needed to deal with cyberbullying problems. Supportive friendships and support from peers are also essential in the aftermath of cyberbullying incidents in helping victims recover and reconnect with classmates. As anti-bullying and cyberbullying school policies tend to still be implemented in an ad-hoc manner in Ireland (Foody et al., 2018), identifying factors that help strengthen support for victims can aid schools in discerning what structures/processes need to be put in place to tackle cyberbullying better and help those affected by it.

Strengths and Limitations

As there is a paucity of qualitative research on adolescents' perspectives on cyberbullying (Dennehy et al., 2020; Hawkins, 2023), this study's in-depth exploration of young people's viewpoints on school support for cyber-victims was a major strength. Adopting a qualitative approach facilitated for a rich understanding of the barriers to help at school and positive aspects of support systems (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The use of PPI research also helped strengthen the research design, recruitment process and treatment of youth participants (Biggane et al. 2019). Consulting young people and post-primary school

guidance counsellors about different parts of the research helped ensure the study's design would be appropriate for adolescents (i.e. suited their preferences) and ensure their wellbeing and safety throughout the process. Additionally, this study upheld strong research ethics through not directly asking participants about personal experiences of cyberbullying or bullying victimisation (Crane & Broome, 2017) or using interview questions that could be triggering (i.e. asking them to imagine themselves in the shoes of a victim). It prioritised adolescents' wellbeing through a carefully thought-out safeguarding protocol and safety measures to support participants' wellbeing during and after the focus groups (i.e. links to counselling services, available guidance counsellors).

Conversely, the study's investigation of students' general perspectives on school support for cyber-victims means findings might not be reflective of victims' real needs. It is uncertain whether participants experienced cyberbullying or not and thus their evaluation of support systems might be limited. Future qualitative studies could expand on this sensitive area of research by recruiting older adolescents who have previously experienced cyberbullying and have recovered from it to minimise the chances of participants experiencing distress. In addition, confidential one-to-one interviews or anonymous written questionnaires could also be used to safely examine the research topic. Moreover, participants only took part in two focus group interviews. Although two focus groups allowed time for youth to become acquainted with the interview process and build rapport with the facilitators, more interviews could have been carried out to provide participants additional time to expand on their views and explore different areas of the research subject. Krueger et al. (2014) recommend researchers to conduct multiple focus groups to ensure participants have discussed all possible topics pertaining to the research question. Certain themes (i.e. peer emotional support) that came up from the interviews could have been further developed with one or two additional focus groups.

Lastly, the PPI research conducted could have provided equal compensation to both adult and youth PPI members. Adults were given higher value book vouchers than young people for their participation due to budget restrictions and the assumption that lower value book vouchers would be suffice for adolescent PPI members. Both groups contributed equally to the PPI research; and thus, future research including a PPI component with both adults and young people could ensure all members, regardless of age, are compensated equally.

Conclusion

Together, these findings reveal that good relationships with staff and peers are a key source of support for cyberbullying victims. Adolescents acquire the ability to cope with and recover from cyberbullying issues through care provided from both groups. McCarty et al. (2016) argue that bullying relates to a lack of care as much as it involves peer aggression. Participants who have had negative experiences accessing support from school personnel described distressing circumstances that exacerbated the damaging effects of victimisation (i.e. being ignored or blamed for an incident). Whereas participants who were met non-judgmentally and kindly by educators indicated the bullying they experienced was often effectively dealt with. This study also illustrates that staff's care for victims does not operate in isolation and is deeply shaped by their understanding of cyberbullying and school policies on confidential reporting procedures and punishment for aggressors. Proximal processes are embedded within a complex system of various educational, legal, and social structures which indirectly affect a young person's development (Tudge et al., 2016), and these need to be factored in when aiming to improve support for cyber-victims. School personnel improving their knowledge of cyberbullying - its relational roots and current online culture - can help pave a path to connecting to students. In addition, school policies must be more aligned with young people's needs (i.e. agency, privacy, autonomy) to help ensure support structures can meet them and encourage victims to reach out for help. The emotional impact of cyberbullying needs to also be incorporated into interventions and punishment systems for perpetrators. Inappropriate consequences that fail to teach bullies about the harm their behaviour may lead to a continuation of peer aggression.

Participants' views on peer support equally shed new light on the social and emotional setbacks that victims might experience after an incident. Their accounts accentuated the importance of peer empathy, sensitivity, and tact in overturning the harsh effects of cyberbullying on a young person's self-esteem and sense of connectedness. The public nature of cyberbullying often leaves youth feeling humiliated and disempowered and the ease with which aggressive acts can be repeated online through image/post sharing (Hawkins, 2023; Menesini, 2013) means victims can suffer greatly. Peers demonstrating clear support for victims in-person and refraining from talking about an incident with others can help victimised adolescents recuperate both psychologically and socially. Furthermore, as bullying is a group process (Desmet, 2016; Salmivalli, 2010), avoiding

spreading information about a cyberbullying case can help influence other classmates to do the same and support a victim.

Future Directions

While this study has revealed how caring student-staff relationships support cyberbullying victims in reaching out for help, future research could further examine how staff support victims emotionally to uncover how their interactions help young people acquire the ability to cope. The learning and exchanges involved in student-staff interactions could be explored more to understand what exactly helps victims attain the skills and resources to deal with cyberbullying issues. Similarly, research could also further investigate how staff support students in forming healthy peer relationships. Participants highlighted staff's role in helping victims make new friends and helping pupils connect with one another. Specific exchanges involved in their passing down of social and empathy skills (i.e. learning how to connect with peers) to students could be looked at to identify the factors involved in helping young people connect better to peers.

Implications

The main findings point to the importance of relational support in helping cyberbullying victims recover and cope. Student-staff relationships based on care and trust are a principal key to effective school support. Being able to trust staff and their skills in helping victims enables youth to feel confident about stepping forward for support when faced with cyberbullying. Staff are also essential in ensuring peer support for victims and teaching victims how to reconnect with classmates and forge new friendships. Overall, these findings indicate the need for strong relationship building between staff and students to enable trust to be cultivated and to ensure a good relationship is established for young people to draw on during different challenges. The most meaningful support is found through regular contact and care by staff and does not require tech-savvy interventions.

Recommendations

Findings from this study run parallel to the aims of current anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying initiatives in Ireland outlined by Cinealtas (Department of Education, 2023). This study's results and the Cinealtas report both underline the necessity of a trustworthy

adult that students can confide in, the need to educate adolescents about the emotional impact of cyberbullying and bullying, and the need for youth led/centred interventions.

As such, the following school policy recommendations can be made to facilitate better support for cyberbullying victims ages 13-15:

1. A designated member of staff (i.e. year head, chaplain) that is responsible for providing pastoral care for a class or year (i.e. regularly checking in on students, providing consistent support for issues such as cyberbullying/bullying).
2. Anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying workshops that focus on teaching students what bullying can do to a victim (i.e. mental health and social consequences) and how to support peers who have been victimised, and punishment systems that also prioritise teaching aggressors about the emotional effect of bullying on victims.
3. Incident reporting systems that respect adolescents' need for confidentiality and agency (i.e. terms of confidentiality that are agreed upon with students and discrete forms of reporting)

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Appendix A

Recruitment Poster Used in Post-Primary Schools

Recruitment Ad - Additional Information Sheet (barcode access)

How Can School Support for Cyberbullying Be Improved?

INFORMATION SHEET – YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

YOU are being invited to participate in a research study that will look at young people's perspectives on school support for cyberbullying. We value the viewpoints of young people and believe these should be prioritised and included when looking to improve mental health services and forms of support for your age group. We are currently looking for post-primary students between the ages of 13-15 to lend us their perspectives on the topic to help improve school support for cyberbullying. We thank you in advance for reading and considering participating ☺

Before deciding, it is important for you to understand why the research is being completed and what it will involve - this information sheet will outline all necessary details. If you agree to take part, we will ask you and your parent/guardian to sign a Consent and Assent Form. If there is anything that is not clear, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read and review it ☺

Why This Study Matters and Why We Need You!

You and/or your friends may have experienced or witnessed bullying on social media or other online platforms (i.e. instant messaging, video-games). Online bullying *or* Cyberbullying affects about 1 in 4 adolescents and is often hard to deal with because mean comments and personal photos/videos posted online can be viewed by many people, shared anonymously and difficult to remove. So far, not much is known about how best to support young people who have experienced cyberbullying and how to prevent it. We would like your viewpoint on this important issue as we believe your experiences and perspectives are needed the most to understand how victims can be supported better at school and how schools can help prevent cyberbullying.

What Participation Involves:

If you agree to participate, you will be taking part in two group interviews (1-2 hours long) called Focus Groups (FG) with 4-7 peers. The interviews will take place during school hours in a private space at your school. The interviews will involve a group chat with myself (the researcher) and peers and a fun, creative workshop (brainstorming exercises, writing activities and collage making) to understand your views on school support for cyberbullying.

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please contact Kristine at:

+353 877 412 360 OR K.VU2@nuigalway.ie
You may also contact your teacher or guidance counsellor if you are interested in participating ☺

Appendix B

Interview Plan – Focus Group 1

First Workshop with Adolescents – 90 to 120 minutes long including a 15-minute break

Introduction: approximately 20 - 30 minutes

Brief introduction to the workshop –

- Thank students for their time, interest, and participation
- Handout name tags
- Explain the workshop briefly and that it is the first of two focus group interviews, the main purpose of the 1st workshop, etc…

We are going to do some introductions first, so you get to know us a bit before we start and so we also get to know you

Introduce myself and the other facilitator – I will tell them a little bit about myself (where I am from, my interest in youth mental health, what my research is focusing on) and the facilitator will briefly introduce herself/himself

So, we are going to go around and get you to introduce yourselves too, tell us a bit about you: i.e. what you like doing outside of school and what inspired you to take part in this study

- Have each student tell the group a bit about themselves, their favourite hobbies, what drew them to participating in the study

It is great to hear how everyone has come to participate in this study and to learn a little bit more about you and your interests – thank you for that.

Role as facilitators:

So, I am just going to tell you a bit about our role as facilitators in the focus group interviews.

My job is to lead the brain-storming sessions and discussions today and next week.

I am here to guide the discussions, and to help support your group work

The second facilitator is here to support the session too, they will be taking some brief notes about the workshop, noting how it is going for everyone and main points brought up during the discussions. These notes will be anonymised and will not be connected to anyone's name or identity.

We are both here if you need support or have questions during the workshop

Your safety and wellbeing are of utmost importance and so we want to be clear that we are here if you need anything. Questions, breaks or private chats with us are most welcome if needed.

Before we officially start the workshop, I am just going to go over safety, confidentiality, and group guidelines.

So as a reminder, this workshop is being audio-recorded. What you share here is confidential, however, and we will only need to break this confidentiality if you or someone you know might be at risk of harm and this becomes known during the workshops.

Personal views and accounts shared in the group discussion must stay confidential and must not be shared with others that are not part of this group. It would be okay, however, to talk about what was generally discussed in today's workshop.

For example, it would be okay to tell your family or friends you talked about different forms of support that you have at the BISH for bullying and cyberbullying. However, it wouldn't be okay to tell your family or friends about other people's particular viewpoints and experiences on the discussion topics.

Does anyone have any questions about this?

In addition, if you feel unwell or uncomfortable during the workshop, you can always ask to speak to myself or Mairead. You can leave for short break if you need it at any time.

Do you have any questions so far?

Next, we are going to go over some basic guidelines for the focus groups to ensure they are an inclusive and safe space for everyone, and that we create and maintain a space that respects people's differences – different identities, viewpoints, and experiences.

So, what does a respectful and safe learning space mean to you?

Maybe add after chat with students:

So yeah, each one of us here is different, even if we may appear to look similar or have things in common. We probably have different opinions on things, different views, etc… Meanwhile, some of us obviously come from a different background, whether that is because our families come from a different country, we practice a different religion from what the norm is here in Ireland, or our skin colour is different from what the norm is.

These differences can shape our experiences and views. It is important to be aware that your views and experiences may be quite different from those of other people in this group. You may voice yours, but it is equally important to respect other people's different viewpoints. Both focus groups, this one and the second one, are not spaces for debating your ideas and is not about who has better views or ideas. Focus groups are about learning from people's different perspectives in a non-judgmental way.

I am also wondering; can anyone tell me: how can a group discussion be respectfully carried out?

Right, so each person has the right to speak their mind and we should also all be mindful about how much time we take to share our views to ensure other people have time to share theirs during a discussion. It is also important to allow people the time to fully express their views and we should try to avoid interrupting people when they are talking.

Is there anything else we can add to the group guidelines?

So, we are going to take a quick 10 minute break before I go over what participating in a focus group involves and before we start our collage-making workshop.

Please help yourself to more water, soda, and snacks.

What is a focus group? – 5 - 10 minutes

So now we are going to look at what a focus group is, what participating in a focus group involves and how to take part in one, and what is expected of you.

Focus groups are a type of group interview. They usually consist of 5 – 10 people.
The purpose of the group is to explore a particular group of individuals' perspectives on an issue or topic. For example, focus groups could focus on young men's perspectives on smoking or young women's views on sport and exercise.

Our focus group will look at years 1-3 students' perspectives on school support for cyberbullying and today we are focusing on how years 1-3 students define cyberbullying.

Focus groups are usually led by one or more facilitators (usually the researchers themselves) but the discussions are driven by participants through natural conversation and discussion.

So even though I have chosen the topic, for example: definitions of cyberbullying, and I may help guide the group discussion, the discussions will be steered by all of you, and you will choose how far we explore a question or topic.

Your job is to contribute to the group discussion by sharing your genuine views on what cyberbullying is and how it is defined by people your age.

You are also going to be asked to brainstorm alone or with a peer/friend through mind/word maps or collage.

Does anyone have any questions?

Next: Collage examples and workshop – 30 minutes

So now we are going to do some brainstorming using collage or mind maps
It's a chance to get a bit creative and brainstorm what cyberbullying means to you and your peers - what is cyberbullying and how you define it.

Has anyone here created a collage before?

So most of you probably have seen one before, and a lot of you might have even made one before too.

Collage are simple pictures/drawings made from cut up pieces of paper, magazines, or newspaper articles. They can even contain other art materials such as stickers, buttons, and other decorative pieces.

They are sometimes created as art pieces alone and sometimes they are made to represent certain ideas, views, and themes. They can be used to reflect and brainstorm on a topic and today we are going to make a collage or mind map to explore what cyberbullying is to you and your peers.

I have some examples up here – my collage pieces represent what youth mental health means to me as a researcher in her 30's.

So we are going to take about 20 minutes to put together a collage (or mind map if you prefer) to explore what cyberbullying means to each of us and how we define cyberbullying.

Think of these questions, I'm putting up on the whiteboard, when you're exploring the definition through collage:

Questions:

How would you define cyberbullying?

How are cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying connected to one another?

How are they different from one another?

What are some examples of cyberbullying issues that people your age face or witness?

Okay, so we are going to take a five minute break before our discussion:

Group Discussion – How do you define cyberbullying? 30 - 40 minutes

So it looks like you've created some great collage work and mind maps.

Does anyone want to share their collage and their thoughts on cyberbullying?

We are going to go around and give those who feel like talking about their collage some time to share their views and ideas:

If you prefer to write about your collage, you can do this too. You are not obligated to share your thoughts in the group.

So next, we are going to open-up a wider discussion on what cyberbullying means to you and your peers:

So how would you guys define cyberbullying?

a) What are some example situations of online bullying or where students are mean to each other online?
b) Is there a connection between bullying people experience in-person

Interview Plan – Focus Group 2

Second workshop with adolescents – Notes and guidelines

Introduction – 5-10 minutes

Check in with students to see how they have been and what they have been up to

Brief introduction to the workshop –
15-20 minutes

- Thank students for their time, interest, and participation
- Ask students to bring out or create new name tags
- Explain the workshop briefly and that it is the second focus group interview, the main purpose of the 2nd workshop – that today's focus is on school support for cyberbullying and their views on it

Go over common guidelines again and ask students if anything should be added or changed based on our last workshop

Pair-work – Brainstorming activity – What are your views on school support for cyberbullying? (15-20 minutes)

Please work together with a peer/friend (groups of 2-3) to explore this question

Use mind-maps, and if you wish, simple collage or drawings to flesh out your ideas

- Ask them to reflect on the types of support they have at their school
- The school staff or people that are there to support them and what they do (how) to support them if a cyberbullying incident occurs
- How does their school educate students on the topic of cyberbullying?
- Is the support for girls and boys different? (only applicable to co-ed schools)
- Is there specific support for issues that boys tend to face online? (boys only schools)
- What's good about the support available?
- How can the support for cyberbullying be improved?
- Are there other types of support for cyberbullying (outside of school) used by students? Describe these:

Break - 5 – 10 minutes

Group Discussion 45 minutes

Go around and ask students about their ideas, mind maps and drawings/collage

Then ask them to describe the school support for cyberbullying at their school

Who are the people that are there to support them?

What happens if someone is cyberbullied – how does the school react and support them? How do students usually react if they or a peer/friend has been cyberbullied?

Go over the following topics:

- How does their school educate students on the topic of cyberbullying?
- Is the support for girls and boys different? (only applicable to co-ed schools)
- Can support be tailored to meet the needs of particular and or diverse adolescents better (ages 13-15, LGBTQ, different religious or cultural background)?
- Is there specific support for issues that boys tend to face online?
- What's good about the support available?
- How can the support for cyberbullying be improved?
- What is the reporting system like?
- Are there other types of support for cyberbullying (outside of school) used by students? Describe these:

Vignettes – 45 minutes

Explain to students they will be looking at some typical cyberbullying scenarios that some students may face and that the purpose is to brainstorm what they feel this student would

need support-wise following such an incident and how they would like school staff to respond.

Handout the fictional cyberbullying scenarios and give students 5-10 minutes to brainstorm alone or with a peer

Convene and have a last group discussion on how they feel schools should respond to each incident?

What are some other possible scenarios? How could these be supported by schools?

Feedback – 5 - 10 minutes

Focus Group Distress Protocol

Adapted from Draucker, Martsolf & Poole's (2009) guidelines on distress protocols for research

Identifying participant distress:

a) A participant states they are not feeling well emotionally and/or they are experiencing a high level of stress or distress
b) A participant shows behaviours that suggests they are experiencing a high level of stress or distress (i.e. crying, withdrawing body language)

Response 1:

Stop the interview and offer support to the participant (I am a qualified and trained counsellor (BACP registered)

Assess their level of stress/distress:

1. How are you feeling right now?
2. How safe do you feel right now?
3. How do you feel about continuing with the interview?

Explain participation is optional and that their wellbeing is more important than finishing the interview.

If the participant feels fine to continue after talking to and supporting them, resume the interview.

If not, go to Response 2:

1. Stop the interview
2. Identify if student requires further support (i.e. guidance counsellor, parent, links to mental health support)
3. Contact school guidance counsellor or a parent for further support if student indicates they would like this
4. If a participant is significantly distressed, contact the school (headteacher i.e.) and available guidance counsellor immediately for further support
5. *If not*, talk with the participant and explain that if they experience an increase in distress or stress over the next days following the interview, they may seek support from their school guidance counsellor or local mental health organisations for further support

Cyberbullying Vignettes – What kinds of support would they like in these situations?

Vignette Example 1:

Alex, a 13-year-old student attending the main Catholic post-primary school in Moycullen, has a photo of them taken by a peer who has previously bullied them while swimming at the local pool with friends. This peer goes on to photo-shop the photo of Alex, making them appear without a swimming suit in the photo. He then shares this photo on Whatsapp with others in their year, leaving Alex feeling humiliated when they find out about it from their best friend.

1. What kinds of support would be helpful to Alex in this situation?

2. How should teachers, guidance counsellors and parents to support her?

3. Are there other school staff or adults that could support Alex in this situation? How so?

4. How could we prevent a cyberbullying incident like this?

Vignette Example 2:

Casey does not have many friends at their post-primary school, and they spend a lot of time alone during lunch periods and breaks. Although they have not been bullied outright, they are often excluded from social groups at school and peers do not say nice things about them. One day, they receive several Facebook messages from an anonymous account that contains insults about the way they look, behave etc… and they do not know who to turn to.

1. What kinds of support would be helpful to Casey in this situation?

2. How could teachers, guidance counsellors and parents support them?

3. Are there other school staff or adults that could support Casey in this situation? How so?

4. How could we prevent a cyberbullying incident like this?

Vignette Example 3:

Teri has gone to the school Christmas fair with a friend. They are having fun trying on different hats and browsing different food stands. Meanwhile, one of Teri's classmates, Darragh, has secretly filmed them holding and looking at an expensive watch. Darragh likes to make fun of classmates that are a bit different and do not give him the attention he wants.

Darragh takes this short video of Teri and merges it with a fake video that shows another student, who looks like Teri, putting the watch in their pocket and walking away. Darragh then takes this video clip he made, which makes Teri look like a thief, and shares it all over Snapchat, spreading rumours that Teri had stolen a pricey watch at the fair. When this snapchat eventually reaches Teri, they become angry and deeply upset. They are unsure of how to seek support and confront Darragh.

1. What kinds of support would be helpful to Teri in this situation?

2. How could teachers, guidance counsellors and parents support them?

3. Are there other school staff or adults that could support Teri in this situation? How so?

4. How could we prevent a cyberbullying incident like this?

Appendix C

Excerpts from Analysis Process

Sample of Coding

[00:35:14.970] - Girl 2

Sometimes we use Teams and stuff, and on Teams, you can like text your teachers privately. So if you had, like, one teacher that you trust, that you trust you could like text them and say what's going on and they can like sort it out.

Codes

Ways of reaching out for support

People who support/trusting relationships

Ways of coping

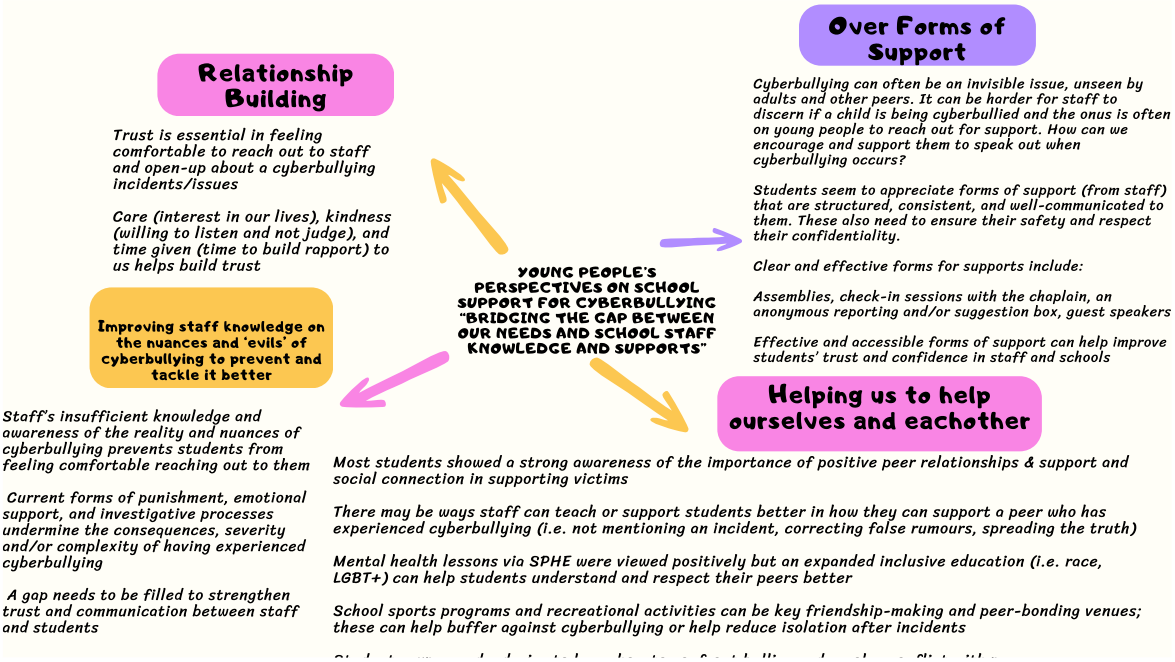
Staff response

Theme Development

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3



Phase 4

Final Themes

Overarching theme 1:

Adults and systems we can trust and depend on

Subthemes:

1. ***Staff who care about us and who invest their time to support us*** (staff who take an interest in issues young people face, staff and the school taking initiative to deal with and tackle cyberbullying, communicating what supports are available to students, making time to support us with bullying and cyberbullying issues)

2. ***Relatable staff that understand our problems and cyberbullying (***Staff that understand young people and the problems they face are deemed as more approachable and trustworthy, students highlight a gap in staff understanding and knowledge on the topics of bullying and cyberbullying and how it impacts them, staff's lack of understanding seems to dissuade some students from seeking support for cyberbullying, the harmful emotional impact of cyberbullying seems to be overlooked or not well-understood by school staff)

3. ***Reporting and support seeking systems that meet and respect our needs and sense of safety/wellbeing*** (anonymous ways of reporting incidents (i.e. anonymous reporting boxes and taking out a reporting student's name from the investigation) and covert ways of seeking support (i.e. using apps to talk to teachers) help protect our privacy and sense of safety, students also want a say in what remains confidential when they confide in teachers and guidance counsellors, there is a lack of trust with some staff as general confidentiality is not guaranteed, a lack of awareness of and respect for students' needs around privacy and anonymity)

4. ***Making sure bullies/cyberbullies learn a lesson and that the impact on victims is taken seriously*** (punishment and consequences for bullies are often not appropriate or severe enough, punishment and consequences for bullies do not target bullies' harmful behaviour and often skim the surface of problems, the emotional impact bullying and cyberbullying has on victims seems to not be accounted for in typical forms of punishment and consequences, school staff/schools seem to not understand there is a mismatch between the impact on victims and typical forms of punishment for bullies)

Overarching theme 2:

Recovery from an incident happens with the support of peers and friends

Subthemes:

1. ***We need peers to show us they have our backs*** (peers vouching for victims (i.e. saying they like them and believe them), peers assuring victims it was not their fault and that everything will be fine, peers can help victims move on by not mentioning what happened/not talking about an incident (i.e. if it is triggering for victims)

2. ***Rebuilding and/or making new connections with peers helps fight the effects of cyberbullying*** (having friends can help victims feel included and less alone, peers and friends can support victims through difficulties after an incident, peers and friends can provide emotional support to victims that they may not get from adults, schools may be able to support students in making new friends and building rapport with peers)

3. ***Peers can help right the wrongs of a cyberbullying incident*** (peers can spread the 'truth' to reverse false rumours (i.e. power in young people's voices and actions; adults are unlikely able to influence young people in this way), they can also speak out to help resolve a cyberbullying issue (i.e. providing evidence against a bully, helping to take down a harmful post or video).

Appendix D

Focus Group Extracts

Theme 1 – Sub-themes 1-4

Facilitator 1 Like, when a student has experienced cyberbullying or there's an incident, how would you say your chaplain would respond now? [00:47:34.830] - Girl 2 She would like to talk to the person that's being cyberbullied and ask them, to tell them like what the person said or like if they said anything more and then she maybe tells the principal, and the principal might try to sort it out.
[00:48:30.830] - Girl 4 Umm sometimes if it's really bothering you, you can go talk to the principal and you don't have to be too specific if you don't really want to be. Then they tell the year head and then the year head would kind of get into a little bit more detail because you kind of have more trust with your year head (slightly inaudible speech).
[01:43:43.900] - Boy 1 If it's in the year that she's working in, like, she's kind of like responsible. It's like she's taking care of them, the school.
[00:17:40.090] - Girl 4 Sometimes like, if they know that it's happening, the teachers will like talk to you privately and like see your view of it, like if it's happening to you.
[00:35:14.970] - Girl 2 Sometimes we use Teams and stuff, and on Teams, you can like text your teachers privately. So if you had, like, one teacher that you trust, that you trust you could like text them and say what's going on and they can like sort it out.
What do you feel is the most important form of support for cyberbullying. We've talked about so many different things... [00:46:06.980] - Boy 4 Emotional, I'd say. Facilitator 1 Can you tell me a little bit more, what you mean by it? I don't want to push you -

[00:46:15.610] - Boy 4

Like someone to help you through it like and like to help make sure they stop bothering you and stuff.

Facilitator 1

So, like having maybe a teacher or your chaplain really following up with you?

[00:46:25.460] - Girl 2

Yeah like checking in with you now and again to make sure you're okay.

Facilitator 1

Is that like a drop in, for the chaplain?

[01:01:41.180] - Girl 2

Yeah, um, you can kind of you can say at like breaktime or something. She's normally around, so you can just ask to talk to her, and she might give you a time to come up to her office and then you can talk to her.

Facilitator 1

Yeah and then Jake - that's great that you have the chaplain here.

[01:02:00.030] - Boy 3

For every year, at the start, she gives you a time, and you go to her office and she just, like, talks to you.

If something happens, [they] can go to her and she'll, like, sort it out

[01:02:47.450] - Boy 4

We do get to go off for break from class and stop in and have a chat with her.

Facilitator 1

That's great there's drop in sessions and then you can make sessions to get to know her, which is great too. Did Henry - do you have something to say?

[01:03:05.490] - Boy 1

She can sometimes come into the classroom to say, can I have a talk with this student?

[01:22:46.070] - Boy 4 (refers to school assemblies)

But it always helps that people care about them.

[00:17:59.540] - Girl 4

I'd say like sometimes if you're upset about it, it's kind of feels better to like let someone know.

Facilitator 1

If you were being bullied, how would, how would you feel about like going to somebody in school?

[01:19:15.130] - Girl 2

You might feel like better afterwards. Sometimes when someone's being bullied, it might affect their mood and stuff. So if they go to a teacher, they'd know that the teacher is going to do something about it to make them feel better afterwards.

[00:56:42.840] - Boy 4

Like some people might be homophobic and like there - they might be more accustomed to feel uncomfortable in themselves. Like there's people to help them like fit in and be who they are.

Facilitator 1

Yeah, so who are these - there are people that are like helping you kind of fit in? Can you tell me more about that?

[00:20:38.690] - Girl 1

Being able to talk to the teachers.

[00:21:03.960] - Girl 1

Like you'd be able to talk to them, they'd listen and understand.

Facilitator 1

Hmm and tell me more about that. So you'd say you'd feel more comfortable opening up to your parents, and can you tell me more about that, why that might be if you feel comfortable sharing that?

[00:58:42.740] - Boy 3

I don't know. I don't know like - You grew up with them...

[00:58:47.130] - Boy 3

It's like, we've only been with these teachers for less than a year like.

Facilitator 1

So you obviously, you have a good trusting relationship and, you know, you feel like you can talk to your parents about most things, right?

[00:58:58.350] - Boy 3

Better than the teachers.

[01:00:11.660] - Boy 1

In secondary school, we only been with them for a year. In primary school, we were with them for, like six, eight years. So we feel more comfortable to talk to them. That was the question...

Facilitator 2

It's okay. Yeah. We're just saying, do you think that might change as you get to know the teachers more?

[01:00:57.400] - Boy 3

Maybe.

Facilitator 1

Thank you. Is there anything that might - is there anything in the support system here so far that prevents you from - or makes - that prevents you from seeking support?

[01:27:21.560] - Boy 3

You don't know the teachers that well so...

Facilitator 1

Okay, tell me more about that.

[01:27:28.270] - Boy 3

Uh...

Facilitator 1

Don't mean to put you on the spot. So you mean?

[01:27:38.940] - Boy 3

Like you don't really talk to the teachers that much, it's like you don't know them at all, really.

Facilitator 1

Do you have something… These guys are talking. Maybe if anyone wants to talk, you can raise your hand as well. Who is there? If you're mentioning some people, some of the teachers are not really providing maybe the emotional support. Who would you feel comfortable talking to?

[00:42:06.610] – Boy 19

Friends.

[00:44:18.220] – Boy 20

And some teachers will like not care and some will…

[00:35:34.810] – Boy 27

I said the teachers and the counsellors are probably the best with for dealing with it.

[00:36:05.560] - Boy 27

They like promise that they'd never say any of it outside of the classroom, and it only stays inside of it

[00:37:01.840] – Boy 24

We have a guidance counsellor who comes in and she brings people out of the classroom.

Boy 23

If you tell a teacher… they'll just tell you to umm… Someone in my class was being bullied and they told a teacher and the teacher told them to stop bullying them.

Facilitator 1

You mentioned your guidance counsellors, teachers. Is there anyone else? I think someone put down the year head?

Boy 19

No. She doesn't care.

Girl 4

Our chaplain brought us out to talk to us just to see how we're getting on, [and] that could be done more.

Girl 3

They only call assemblies when somebody's told them that cyberbullying has happened. Maybe if they did it more often and somebody didn't really want to confess to the teachers yet because they were like too shy to, then the teachers might get to know [them and that might change].

[00:28:50.960] - Boy 30

Those people who have a closer relationship with their parents - their parents would like come to the school to talk about it.

[00:28:59.180] – Facilitator 1

So again, you said it's like the quality of the relationship with the parents umm..

[00:29:03.410] - Boy 30

Yeah

00:38:31.000] - Boy 30

For example, if someone's like getting bullied online and one of the classmates find out and they want to report it, they can like write a note to like the guidance counsellors anonymously. They don't have to put their name at all. And then they can say like, this person is getting bullied by this person. Or if they don't know who's doing the bullying, they can just say like this person is getting bullied... And then they can send it down the guidance counsellor and then the guidance counsellor can come up and bring the other person that's being bullied out of class and talk to them. I said it's okay if like you want to, if you need help, you can go to like the guidance counsellor, but it's not really encouraged. Not really encouraged, but not many people go.

Facilitator 1

Can you tell me why people wouldn't go to the guidance counsellor? Why you said it's not encouraged, right?

[00:14:16.750] - Boy 31

They just - I'd say they just feel like it's going to get out there or something like that. Something will happen, maybe.

[00:14:43.580] - Boy 29

Like the teacher says something to the student, it might make the situation worse.

[00:15:18.000] - Boy 30

It'll just be like distrust against teachers or something like if the story came out...
-

[01:18:59.610] - Boy 29

Maybe showing the picture to someone, with someone like an adult and saying that [someone tampered with it] (slightly inaudible speech).

[01:27:59.760] – Facilitator 1

Ignoring it... What if for some reason Casey wasn't able to ignore it? What kind of support might she [like]?

[01:28:05.888] - Boy 30

Like ask teachers to help her...

Facilitator 1

Have you any ideas about, how they could help prevent cyberbullying, like through talks, through as you said, it could be through something you're doing in your class. It could be through even having conversations about mental health, it's all related, right. So do you guys want to maybe think about that for a few minutes or do you [have] any ideas?

[01:40:11.230] - Boy 3

Like, just talk to other people and try to convince them to talk to people and to like seek help.

[00:20:15.510] – Girl 10

Also, you can't relate to them. If you've ever gotten in trouble with them, say, you want to talk to a teacher, but in their class, you just don't particularly like that teacher, but they're the person you're supposed to talk to or whatever. You just don't feel comfortable talking to them.

[00:20:39.740] – Facilitator 1

You have to have good relationship with them.

[00:20:42.660] – Girl 14

A lot of us didn't have... I'm talking from experience, but a lot of us didn't have good experiences talking to bullying in primary school. I was getting bullied by a girl, and I told the teacher, and I ended up getting in trouble instead. It's like there's... It's just like...

[00:21:05.450] - Girl 14

Teachers, you talk to the teacher, but a lot of the times when we do… They either don't care or it ends up worse because either the bullying gets worse because you told the teacher, or the teacher makes it worse by either embarrassing you or by not taking you seriously. They never take you seriously. They just think they're above you because...

00:22:19.190] - Girl 14

If it's bullying, they might just come up to them and embarrass you because they're right there. But if it's cyberbullying, they might be like, oh, this is like a matter you should do with your parents or something.

[00:41:54.130] – Boy 17

Yeah, same.

[00:41:55.890] - Girl 14

He brings people up, but I don't know how he chose that. He never talked to me or anything. He talked to me at the start of the [year].

[00:52:22.420] – Facilitator 1

No worries. Questions are allowed. What about the people involved in supporting you? You mentioned mentors and tutors. I'm not really sure…

[00:52:33.910] – Boy 16

We have a class tutor. For 1F, that's our thing. We have Mr. Brown. He's our history teacher as well. I don't know if he has a special job or anything, but he's one of the best teachers in the school. He's really nice.

[00:52:57.800] – Facilitator 1

Would you feel comfortable opening up to this teacher if something happens? What would make him someone... What makes him good person to open up to?

[00:53:02.660] - Girl 14

He's goofy.

[00:53:02.780] - Boy 16

He jokes with us sometimes.

[00:53:03.080] - Facilitator 1

He's able to meet you eye-to-eye and something. Jokes are important.

[00:53:03.770] - Girl 14

He doesn't act like he's higher than us. He knows what

[00:53:04.160] - Boy 16

Yeah, that's what I hate about teachers. You often can’t talk to them. I think it’s mainly the age gap. You feel like you can’t relate to them as much as they’re in the past.

01:00:26.120] - Facilitator 1

If you had a situation where you felt like you probably needed support, I'm asking the boys here, where do you think you would go? If you feel comfortable sharing this, though.

[01:00:38.860] - Boy 16

Talk to my dad.

[01:13:13.240] – Boy 17

Not like a sub for history, but she taught us a few weeks. She was a trainee. I forget her name. Miss. Lewis… She was younger.

[01:13:26.510] - Boy 16

She was the best. She had Snapchat, and she knew more you could relate to her. She knew what was popular in that.

[01:13:36.830] - Facilitator 1

You felt against someone?

[01:13:39.170] - Boy 16

If I was to talk to someone, maybe I would go to Miss Lewis. I don't know if she's in school anymore, but she's younger.

Boy 17

People from outside the school who put on workshops - they actually know what they're talking about.

[01:19:13.020] – Boy 15

About the anonymous thing. In primary school, we had this other thing which was called the Checkup. Basically there was a box in the PE hall. We didn't go to class, we went to the PE hall to line up from there. There was notes beside it. If you wanted to write something, you could say it anonymously, but you just put in the box. There was this teacher that everybody trusted because he was a really nice teacher.

[01:42:03.700] - Girl 14

I think talks would be good, but, in smaller groups, because whenever you usually do talks, they usually come into a classroom, and then you're boxed out and you all got in rows of two, and it doesn't really feel like… You don't feel like any connection with the person, so it doesn't really mean anything to you.

[01:37:41.740] - Boy 16

Most likely it's probably one of the girls in her class, so try and get the teacher to help her find out who it was.

[00:17:07.190] – Girl 10

What they usually do in schools is if you report something that's serious, what they do is they just tell your parents even if you don't want them to know

Facilitator 1 (30:41)

You feel - would you and your peers or your friends feel comfortable going to the school counsellor?

Whole group (30:49)

No..

Girl 10 (30:49)
They'll just tell all the teachers like... It's not like confidential... They kind of have a duty to kind of report everything to the year head and the tutors and like the principal. Nothing's really confidential... It's basically the same as just going to your year head about that kind of stuff [inaudible 00:31:09] because they just tell them.

Facilitator 1 (31:21)
They'd have to tell the year heads and teachers, even if it's not something too serious, do you know?

Girl 10 (31:27)
Yeah, probably... They wouldn't tell too many people depending on the severity of it, but they would like to tell your year head.

Facilitator 1 (31:37)
Yeah. Do you have the choice to ask them not to do that? If you just want to talk about something for support? It would depend how severe it is.

Girl 10 (31:46)
I feel they would anyway...

Girl 10 (32:03)
[inaudible 00:32:09] Talking to like the counsellor shouldn't necessarily be the school's problem... More so your problem if you just need like an extra form of support or outlet or someone to talk to.

Girl 10 (33:13)
They could be like signing an agreement for them not to tell the year head unless it was like something that was really like, that could affect you or could harm you... Or you could be in danger...

Facilitator 1 (33:23)
That's a good idea. Like assuring you...

Girl 10 33:28)
Yeah like assuring that our privacy is being respected.

Facilitator 1 (33:31)
That's a really great idea because it can be the other way around where you have to share certain things, so they should be able to give you some assurance too.

Girl 10 (33:41)
Yeah, so no one really goes to the counsellor..

Facilitator 1 (35:21)
What's the name of the sister/chaplain again?

Girl 10 (35:23)
Sister Amy

Facilitator 1 (35:25)
Okay. Would you feel more comfortable opening up to her?

Girl 10 (35:30)
Yeah, she's really honest, she's really nice.

Facilitator 1 (36:01)
Why would you feel uncomfortable opening up to her?

Boy 18 (36:05)
Because she always gets mad at me for no reason. [inaudible 00:36:11] she just starts shouting at me, telling me to move or get out of the line or something [inaudible 00:36:14].

Boy 12 (38:00)
You can just go to them after class and just say, "This person..' I've had no experience with this. I've been lucky. But just go to them [inaudible 00:38:09] and say, "This person is bullying me,' or anything like that and they'll probably help you out.

Girl 10 (38:21)
Yeah, more comfortable with like the tutors I think because they're more restricted to your class

Girl 10 (40:25)
Coaches, occasionally depending on which coaches. For instance like sports coaches or gaming coaches.

Facilitator 1 (40:36)
How would you say they support students?

Girl 10 (40:38)
They're just like - they're nice. They're less serious than other teachers in school, even though they are teachers themselves. Since you are a part of their team, they look upon you as a communal player in the team, so they kind of take care of you.

[01:42:03.700] – Girl 14

I think talks would be good, but, in smaller groups, because whenever you usually do talks, they usually come into a classroom, and then you're boxed out and you all got in rows of two, and it doesn't really feel like… You don't feel like any connection with the person, so it doesn't really mean anything to you.

47:52 – Boy 16

I don’t think they care about boys to be honest

47:52 - Facilitator 1

Can you tell me a bit more? Why is that?

48:00 Boy 16

Probably because they think they can deal with it by themselves.

48:07: Boy 16

They feel like they're dealing with it themselves. It happened to me before. Like I was getting bullied and no one really cared. They'd tell us to deal with it ourselves.

Most of the time, boys don't want to say anything.

Boy 16

[01:20:05.328]

If someone's like getting bullied online and one of the classmates find out and they want to report it, they can like write a note to like the guidance counsellors anonymously. They don't have to put their name at all.

Boy 13

[01:19:46.130]

But also sometimes just not to make it look like, "Oh, you put something in," and everybody could see you putting it in. Sometimes they would bring out classes and everybody would have to write something on the note, even if it was nothing. You can just doodle. Then we had to put it in the box so that it wouldn't be like, "Oh," let's say it was just Diane who put in the note, so she obviously has a problem. It was like you never knew who actually.

Student 1 (gender not specified)

[01:20:55.240] -

I like the anonymous reporting system because sometimes it's kind of hard to look at someone in their face if you're accusing them of… But the problem with it is that it's just really easy to put in an anonymous report which is false, and it's also more likely that a false report will happen. It's been proven that when you're anonymous, you're more likely to do things which you wouldn't do normally because your identity isn't connected to it, so there could be a lot of false reports.

[01:21:47.490] -

It's good for support if you don't… If there was a place to tell a teacher about it online, I think it'd be good because usually you have to go in person, so people usually see you talking to that teacher. They

can guess what you're doing. But if there was a thing online where you should contact a teacher online and talk about bullying through there, it will be good.

01:41:11.790] – Boy 16

Not really because this normally never really works because usually what happens when you're getting bullied is the teacher goes over and they, "Oh, so you guys just say sorry and shake hands," and it all be all right. But then the bully doesn't get any punishment for it, so they keep thinking they can do it, so they just keep doing it. That's actually a big issue, is that they don't take it really seriously. They just think it's something minor and that they'll be friends, maybe that they were just doing some dumb joke. Then that just makes the bully feel more secure when he's doing this, that he's not going to get in trouble. Then he'll bully even more, and the situation just gets out of hand.

(53:39) Girl 10

I think if someone sees you, if you're ever called out of class or something to discuss it, where if you're seen going into like the office and stuff, like rumours are started and people are all talking about it in your year. Then everyone's like, oh my God, why were you in there? Oh, my God, what did they say? What was that about? Then people eventually find out and you get a bad reputation.

(54:09) Girl 10

Yeah, people always say you're snitching.

(58:06) Girl 10

Social media can be fine. It can be great place to share your feelings, share pictures with your friends and stuff. But it can also have its bad things, but it's people that make it bad not the actual app.

[01:19:59.770] – Facilitator 2

Would you prefer it were totally anonymous or would you have any worries about it remaining anonymous if you report?

[01:20:06.380] - Girl 2

I'd prefer it to be totally anonymous. Maybe someone doesn't want people to know that they're getting bullied.

[01:07:09.090] - Boy 4

Like, say if it was their friend who was cyberbullying someone, someone might not want to admit that they're doing it because they don't want to ruin their friendship. There should be like an anonymous way... so they won't know that it was you. Because like you might really care about that friendship... you might not want to lose it

[01:20:58.310] - Girl 2

Sometimes say like at break time, in the hallway you ask like when the teachers are available to talk and then once you come back and talk to people, they might keep asking like, 'oh, what did you talk to her about? What did you do?'

[01:33:40.450] - Boy 3

They'd rather take the suspension than lose their phone for like two weeks. It’s the stupidest punishment.

[01:34:02.330] - Boy 4

You don't have to go into school. That's kind of like, there's kind of no point in sending him to school if the punishment is going to be sending him away from school like.

[01:34:47.450] - Girl 3

No cause like.. like they're not going to do anything about it. They're just going to sit at home on their phones and like no one's telling them off about it.

[01:37:13.280] - Boy 3

Detention - people don't really care about detention. Half the time people don't show up to the room

[01:37:47.840] - Boy 3

When the parents talk to them about it, they care a bit more, they take up their phone or something, and then next time they think about it.

[1:41:11.070] - Boy 1

Even so, it wouldn’t feel much different from the suspension because you’re sitting in the classroom. If you’re going home, then obviously your parents are going to punish you somehow

[01:23:57.060] - Boy 3

It's more like they're from the same generation as you kind of... Like if they're not too, like a lot older. If they're 18 or 17, you can talk to them. Like they've been through it before.

00:21:05.450] – Girl 14

Teachers, you talk to the teacher, but a lot of the times when we do… They either don't care or it ends up worse because either the bullying gets worse because you told the teacher, or the teacher makes it worse by either embarrassing you or by not taking you seriously. They never take you seriously. They just think they're above you because...

They're like shake hands now. If it happens again, then come to me, and then when it happens again... Oh, don't worry…

[00:21:44.750] - Girl 14

Usually, the conclusion is say sorry to each other, which usually doesn't work.

00:22:32.160] – Girl 14

There's also the thing that it's very easy on the Internet. I think you mentioned this before. You can't indicate tone on the Internet, and so you might know someone's tone or you might know what the person meant, but it can't be communicated exactly through the thing. So they might just say, oh, it's harmless. Or sometimes people can accuse you of bullying for what is like teasing. But through the Internet, again, you can't indicate tone.

00:22:57.780] – Girl 14

It's kind of a problem not only with people that are being bullied, but also people being accused. Because on the Internet, people tend to be more vocal and say things that they wouldn't in real life, but also that includes with joking and stuff, and stuff they wouldn't really be doing in person. But for some people, it's okay. But if you take what they say out of context, you can really just...

Facilitator 1

So you guys mentioned, you think the teachers or people don't take bullying or cyberbullying seriously you feel? Is it because you think they don't have time or they just don't understand it?

[00:24:22.290] – Girl 15

They don't really understand, I think.

00:24:25.150] – Boy 15

Especially with... There's Internet slime stuff. Or even an entire culture which has been cultivated by the Internet, which you don't really understand it unless you've been on the Internet for a long time. Again, things can be taken out of context with things that sound worse or things can sound not as bad, but they are.

(01:40:34) Boy 13

Schools don’t really teach the effects of bullying. They just teach how it occurs. I think this should be more like look into the effects on a person after being bullied so people would understand what they’re doing to someone.

(01:41:44) Girl 10

I think along the lines of how you said it would scare children. I think that’s kind of a good thing. The fact that you’re not going to bully someone if you realise how badly it could affect them, if you realise the consequences of what you’re doing. If you’re kind of scared of what could happen, that’s a good thing because it will teach you to [not do it].

Theme 2

[01:26:15.150] - Girl 2 Because he feels humiliated, talking to someone about it might make him feel less humiliated or help them to feel better afterwards. To say if they deleted the photo and then someone told him that the photo has been deleted, Alex might start to feel better.
[01:27:39.670] - Girl 1 Probably like um emotional. Like they might get sad, and it might be hard to be around friends. It might be a bit awkward and embarrassing to be around them.
[01:29:48.520] - Boy 1 I think it would help him if they just didn't talk about it and they just like moved on.
[01:30:01.490] - Girl 2 Say if you're out with friends, to like not mention it, because Alex could get upset.
[01:46:13.240] - Boy 3 They could just like [keep it quiet] once they found out that someone had made a fake video.
Facilitator 1 (01:26:39) Thinking about Alex, what type of support would Alex want in that situation? Boy 27 (01:26:49) People reassuring him, that it's okay [inaudible 01:26:54] that's just not real.
Boy 19 (01:35:45) Other people that are like excluded could join together with like Casey Facilitator 1 (01:35:50) Are you saying maybe some support from friends or from peers or classmates? Boy 19 (01:36:00) Casey can also be excluded. All the students also like that. They can join together...
Facilitator 1 (01:43:08) Just imagine if Terry was upset in the situation, what type of support would he like? Boy 27 (01:43:14) People like vouch and say like they like him.
Boy 30 (01:43:22) People believe him..

Boy 26 (50:03)

Just someone to talk to. Someone who maybe has gone through the same thing and then like help them through it.

Facilitator 1 01:42:37

If Casey was your friend, for eample, Casey were your friend, someone you knew, what support would you like for them?

Boy 27 01:42:57

People like banding together and people trying to find out who did it, who made the account

01:00:34.690] - Boy 2

Yeah, they'd like come to you and ask how you're doing, if you're okay...

[01:00:43.480] - Facilitator 1

Does this happen naturally or do the teachers and guidance counsellors kind of encourage that?

[01:00:50.200] - Boy 2

Uh naturally...

[01:35:08.800] - Boy 1

Maybe his friends to say that it's fake.

[01:35:13.380] - Boy 3

Maybe like getting his friends to post on their stories like it's fake and what the true story is, and maybe it gets shared across [social media] and then it'll die down...

Boy 13 (01:31:24)
They could do what our school does. During the summer, there's like programs for students. We have a garden outside, so they just ask anyone who's finding it kind of tough to come in so they can like socialize with other people that are in the same situation as them.

Boy 12 (01:31:52)
I remember in the first week of first year, we did this thing where the whole year would be separated into groups of like, five or six, and then it'd be like a bonding experience where we play games together. It's not like you're in a room with 30 random people and you have to decide who to make friends with. You can connect to those six people and then it might be easier.

Boy 12 (01:34:33)
I also think they should support the bullies because they're probably not bullying because they have a great life. They're probably bullying because maybe they're upset themselves. They have a bad home life. Even if the teacher just asked,why are you doing this? Is there anything going on?

Boy 12 (01:37:30)

Well he would want people to believe his side of the story. That he didn't steal it, and it'd be like an awkward situation because how would you prove your innocence?
Girl 5 00:45:30 You can go to your friends when you're against cyberbullying. It doesn't have to be cyberbullying. But if you are against cyberbullying, you can go to your friends, and they can help you get help
Girl 7 01:39:32 She might just want to have a friend that she could trust… so she can tell someone about this and they could like help her [she can] try to like make some friends
Boy 8 01:36:16 She obviously doesn't want to be friends with the people who are excluding her, I think she should stop trying to join their group and stuff and then find one or two people who don't do that and make good friends with them. She could just ignore everyone else because she has friends.
Girl 3 01:34:02 Maybe try to keep her like few friends close to her
Girl 4 01:35:14 Teach her how to make friends or teach her how to ignore that
Boy 2 01:55:32 Like in P.E., you could like mix the groups and like do activities outside of school. You mix the groups and find new friends
Girl 3 01:27:18 To say if they deleted the photo and then someone told him that the photo has been deleted, Alex might start to feel better
Boy 3 01:42:22 I think Terry would like his classmates to know that they didn't steal the watch. Like, if the person that like had the watch, told the teachers or something that no one stole the watch, and then everyone would like, kind of forget about it.
Girl 4 01:27:44 Maybe showing the picture to someone, with someone like an adult and saying that someone tampered with it.
Girl 3 01:46:17 So like say, you could tell them (teachers) who might have done it.

Appendix E

Parent Consent Forms & Adolescent Assent Forms

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

How School Support for Cyberbullying Can be Improved: A Study Exploring the Perspectives of Post-Primary School Students (Ages 13 -15)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - PARENTS

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study that will look at adolescents' perspectives on school support for cyberbullying. Before you both decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being completed and what it will involve - this information sheet will outline all necessary details. If you agree to take part, we will ask you and your child to sign a Consent and Assent Form. If there is anything that is not clear, we will be happy to explain it to you ☺ Please take as much time as you need to read and review it.

About Me:

I am a registered and qualified mental health counsellor (BACP) who is completing a PhD degree at the University of Galway. I have a keen interest in young people's mental health and the general topic of wellbeing, and my goal is to carry out research on topics that matter to youth in the hopes of being able to improve support systems for children and young people.

Research Purpose:

Cyberbullying is a type of bullying that takes place online, usually via social media (i.e. Facebook), instant-messaging and/or other popular online platforms (i.e. video games). As mean comments and private images/videos sent online can be viewed by many, shared anonymously and difficult to remove from an app or chat, its impact on young people's mental health can sometimes be more severe than that of face-to-face bullying (Kowlaski et al., 2014). Research shows that general support for cyberbullying often does not meet adolescent victims' actual needs (Ranney et al., 2019; Dennehy et al., 2020). The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of adolescents' experiences of and viewpoints on support for cyberbullying within their post-primary school to identify how different forms of school support for cyberbullying can be improved.

What Participation Involves:

If you and your child agree to participate, they will take part in two focus group (FG) interviews (1-2 hours long) with 4-7 peers. The interviews will take place in a private and accessible space at their school and will involve a group discussion with myself (the researcher) and peers and a creative workshop consisting of brainstorming exercises, writing exercises and collage making. Additionally, I will have a second person (another doctoral research or my PhD supervisor) to assist with the group workshops and focus group interviews.

The first FG will focus on students and myself getting to know one another, students becoming familiar with how a focus group works and understanding how students define cyberbullying. The second FG will explore students' views on school support for cyberbullying.

In addition to the group discussions, your child will also be able to share their ideas and views through private written exercises in both interviews. This ensures they can safely and confidentially share perspectives they may not be comfortable sharing in a group. Written and verbal disclosures will be anonymised (personal information changed or removed) and pooled together with other students' interview extracts (from 2-3 other post-primary schools) for the final themes/findings. Thus, your child's confidentiality (disclosures relating to support offered at their school) should not be compromised.

Fictional vignettes of different cyberbullying scenarios will also be used to elicit students' views on how schools should support cyber-victims as opposed to directly asking them about their personal experiences. Using fictional scenarios to tap at their views should reduce the risk of young people feeling distressed during or after the interviews and reduce the risk of their disclosures threatening their confidentiality.

A Zoom meeting will also be carried out with adolescents after interview transcripts are analysed and grouped into themes to check whether the themes reflect their perspectives and experiences.

Participation Outline, Data Protection, and Opting out:

We will meet 3 times over the course of 4 – 8 months. The two focus groups will take place between January and June 2023 and on the final occasion, I will meet with the young people to share the results from the whole group and to review the findings (between May and October 2023). Your child may participate in the focus group interviews and choose to opt out of the Zoom review meeting.

All interviews will be audio-recorded, and these recordings and their related transcripts and notes will be stored on the University of Galway's secure OneDrive and/or a locked filing cabinet. Your child's personal information will be stored for no more than seven years, after which they will be permanently deleted. Their recordings, transcripts, information, and related notes will be kept confidential and will only be accessed and viewed by myself and my academic supervisors. The interview recordings will be destroyed once the interview transcripts are transcribed and analysed.

Confidentiality will only be breached if your child or someone they know may be at risk of harm (i.e. abuse) and/or at risk of harming another person. If your child may be at risk of harm/at risk of harming another person, the school guidance counsellor will be contacted for immediate support before further action is taken should additional support or action be needed (i.e. emergency services, contacting parents). Furthermore, all data (interview transcripts and written accounts) will be anonymised (personally identifiable data will either be removed or changed to protect participants' identities) once the interview transcripts and written accounts are reviewed. Any views that your child discloses in the interviews and written exercises about their school's support system for cyberbullying will not be shared with school staff. These views will be pooled together with the views of other young people from other post-primary schools to explore current school support for cyberbullying.

Lastly, participation is a choice, and you and your child may choose not to participate. You may change your mind and stop participation at any time, and this will not result in a penalty or loss of benefits at your child's school. Students may leave the study at any time, even if parents/guardians have given consent for them to participate.

Your child will also be able to request to have their data (interview and written extracts) withdrawn from the study once the themes/findings are finalised and shared with them. They will have one month from the time themes are shared with them to withdraw their data (themes will be finalised 6-9 months after interviews are completed and they will receive an exact deadline date for withdrawal at this time).

How will information about my child be used?

Information collected through in-person and Zoom group interviews will be used to investigate young people's viewpoints on school support for cyberbullying to understand what current forms of support are like, how some are helpful to students and how some could be improved according to students. We will be reviewing all quotations (what they say) from your child's interviews and all sections from their written exercises to identify themes across theirs and other adolescent participants' perspectives on school support for cyberbullying.

We may also use these quotations and written segments in report writing for the school, academic presentations, or journal article publications related to the study if you and your child agree for them to be used. Your child's and their peers' viewpoints could shed an important light on the topic of school support for cyberbullying and using this study's findings in future presentations, report writing, or journal publications could help contribute to improving support systems for young people. Written consent forms will ask you and your child if their quotations and written segments can be used in future reports/presentations/publications.

Benefits and Risks:

Participating in this study has many benefits. It can help young people build their confidence, learn how to voice their concerns, and gain research skills. As a thank you, lunch/snacks and beverages will be provided to adolescents during the focus group interviews.

It is important to note that participation in interview discussions and exercises may cause emotional distress to some young people, due to the potentially serious nature of topics discussed. Your child may take a break, leave the discussion, or leave the interview at any time. Free counselling links are provided at the end of this form in the case your child needs to talk to someone/needs support after the interviews. I will also be available at the end of each interview to support them if needed.

Questions and Special Requests:

In addition, you and your child may contact me if special arrangements (i.e. accessibility, learning need or difficulty) need to be made ahead of the FG interviews and/or if there are particular concerns about participation (i.e. past conflict or issue with a peer, past bullying situation). I will do my best to accommodate all requests and preferences to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all participants.

For all questions, comments and/or emergencies, please email or call:

Kristine Vu (Principal Research Investigator – PhD Candidate)

K.Vu2@nuigalway.ie

+353 877 412 360 Dr. Caroline Heary

Caroline.Heary@nuigalway.ie (Academic Supervisor)

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

How Can School Support for Cyberbullying Be Improved? – A Qualitative Study

INFORMATION SHEET – YOUNG PEOPLE

YOU are being invited to participate in a research study that will look at young people's perspectives on school support for cyberbullying. We value the viewpoints of young people and believe these should be prioritised and included when looking to improve mental health services and forms of support for your age group. We are currently looking for post-primary students between the ages of 13-15 to lend us their perspectives on the topic to help improve school support for cyberbullying. We thank you in advance for reading and considering participating ☺

Before deciding, it is important for you to understand why the research is being completed and what it will involve - this information sheet will outline all necessary details. If you agree to take part, we will ask you and your parent/guardian to sign a Consent and Assent Form. If there is anything that is not clear, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read and review it ☺

Why This Study Matters and Why We Need You!

You and/or your friends may have experienced or witnessed bullying on social media or other online platforms (i.e. instant messaging, video-games). Online bullying *or* Cyberbullying affects about 1 in 4 adolescents and is often hard to deal with because mean comments and personal photos/videos posted online can be viewed by many people, shared anonymously and difficult to remove. So far, not much is known about how best to support young people who have experienced cyberbullying and how to prevent it. We would like your viewpoint on this important issue as we believe your experiences and perspectives are needed the most to understand how victims can be supported better at school and how schools can help prevent cyberbullying.

What Participation Involves:

If you agree to participate, you will be taking part in two group interviews (1-2 hours long) called Focus Groups (FG) with 4-7 peers. The interviews will take place during school hours in a private space at your school. The interviews will involve a group chat with myself (the researcher) and peers and a fun, creative workshop (brainstorming exercises, writing activities and collage making) to understand your views on school support for cyberbullying.

First Focus Group:
• A 'get to know each other' session with introductions and 'icebreaker' games

• Learning how a focus group works
• Exploring your definition of cyberbullying through art and collage

Second Focus Group:
• Exploring your views on school support for cyberbullying through fun writing and art activities

There will also be an option to share your ideas and experiences through private written exercises if you don't feel comfortable sharing some views etc... in the group discussions. This will ensure your accounts are kept confidential and that you feel safe when sharing them. What you say and what you write about will be anonymised (personal information changed or removed) and pooled together with other students' views (from 2-3 other post-primary schools) for the final themes/findings. These will

be shared without specific reference to schools. As a result, your confidentiality (views relating to support offered at your school) should not be compromised.

In addition, fictional vignettes (stories) of different cyberbullying scenarios will be used to explore your views on how schools should support cyber-victims as opposed to directly asking you about your personal experiences. This can help prevent you feeling distressed during or after the interviews and reduce the risk of your accounts (what you say and write) compromising your confidentiality.

Once the interviews are reviewed and analysed, you will also have the option to participate in a Zoom review meeting with myself and peers you interviewed with to go over the study's findings. In this meeting, the findings will be reviewed with you to ensure that they reflect the group's overall experiences and viewpoints.

Participation Details and Data/Information Protection:

We will meet 3 times over the course of 4 – 8 months. The two focus groups will take place between January 2023 and June 2023 and there will be an option to meet to share the results from the whole group and to review the findings between May and October 2023.
You can participate in the focus group interviews and choose to not participate in the Zoom review meeting.

All interviews will be audio-recorded and these recordings and their related transcripts, notes and findings will be stored on the University of Galway's secure OneDrive and/or a locked filing cabinet. Your personal information will be stored for no more than seven years, after which they will be permanently deleted. Your recordings, transcripts, information, and related notes will be kept confidential and will only be accessed and viewed by myself and my university supervisors. The interview recordings will be destroyed once the interview transcripts are transcribed and analysed.

Confidentiality will only be breached if you or someone you know may be at risk of harm (i.e. abuse) and/or at risk of harming another person. Furthermore, all information from your interviews and written accounts will be anonymised, which means all personal information (for example: names of people in your life) will either be removed or changed to protect your identity. This will be completed once the interview transcripts and written exercises are reviewed. Any views you disclose in the interviews and written exercises about your school's support system for cyberbullying will not be shared with school staff. These views will be pooled together with the views of other young people from other post-primary schools to explore current school support for cyberbullying.

Lastly, participation is a choice, and you and your parent may choose not to participate. You may leave at any time, and this will not result in a penalty. You may leave the study at any time, even if your parent/guardian has given consent for you to participate.

You may also request to withdraw your data from the study (have what you say and write about taken out of the findings) once findings and themes are finalised. You will receive a copy of the final themes 6-9 months after interviews are completed and at this time you will be given one month to withdraw your data.

How will information about me be used:

Information collected through in-person and Zoom group interviews will be used to examine yours and your peers' viewpoints on school support for cyberbullying to understand what current forms of support are like, how some are helpful to students and how some can be improved. We will be reviewing all quotations (what you say) from your interviews and all sections from your written exercises to identify themes across yours and other adolescent participants' perspectives on school support for cyberbullying.

We may also use these quotations and sections from your written exercises in future report writing, presentations, or journal article publications related to the study if you and your parent/guardian agree for them to be used. Yours and you peers' viewpoints could shed an important light on the topic of school support for cyberbullying and help contribute to improving support systems for young people. This written consent form will ask you and your parent/guardian if your quotations and written statements can be used in future studies, presentations, and publications.

Benefits and Risks:

Participating in this study has several benefits ☺ It can help you gain new research and creative skills and help you build confidence in voicing your concerns on topics that impact young people. Lunch/snacks and beverages will also be provided during the focus group interviews as a thank you ☺

It is important to understand that participating in interview discussions and exercises may cause you some emotional distress as serious or sensitive topics may come up in the interview and exercises. You may take a break, leave the discussion, or leave the interview at any time. You will be given links to free counselling services (located at the end of this form) in the case you need to talk to someone/need support after the interviews. I will also be available at the end of each interview to chat should you need support.

Questions and Special Requests:

You and your parent can contact me if special arrangements (i.e. accessibility, learning need or difficulty) need to be made ahead of the interviews and/or if you have particular concerns about participation (i.e. past conflict or issue with a peer, past bullying situation). I will do my best to accommodate all requests and preferences to ensure your safety and wellbeing.

For all questions, comments and/or emergencies, please email or call: Kristine Vu (Principal Research Investigator – PhD Candidate)

K.Vu2@nuigalway.ie - +353 877 412 360

Dr. Caroline Heary
Caroline.Heary@nuigalway.ie (Academic Supervisor)

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Please answer the following questions by circling YES or NO
Attention Please initial the bottom left-hand corner of all consent/assent form pages

I have read and understood the **Information Sheet** about this research project. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that my child does not have to take part in this study and that they may leave the study at any time. ***I understand that they don't have to give a reason for leaving/opting out*.**	**Yes**	**No**
I have been given enough time to consider whether I want my child to take part in this study.	**Yes**	**No**
I agree for the quotes and sections from my child's focus group interviews and written accounts to be used in this PhD project, future research publications, presentations, and/or school report writing unless any risk of harm etc.. is raised.	**Yes**	**No**
I consent for my child to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks and benefits of participation.	**Yes**	**No**
I consent for my child and/or myself to be contacted by researchers as part of this research study.	**Yes**	**No**

Required Signature:

—----------

Parent/Guardian's Name (Block Capitals) —----------

Parent Contact Information:

Phone Number /Mobile Number _____ Email _____

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

ADOLESCENT ASSENT

Please answer the following questions by circling YES or NO

I have read and understood the **Information Sheet** about this research study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and that I can leave at any time. I understand that I don't have to give a reason for opting out.	**Yes**	**No**
I have been given enough time to consider whether I want to take part in this study.	**Yes**	**No**
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks and benefits of participation.	**Yes**	**No**
I agree for quotes and sections from my interviews and written accounts to be used in the PhD research project unless any risk of harm etc...is raised.	**Yes**	**No**
I agree for quotes and sections from focus group interviews and written accounts to be used in future research publications, presentations, and/or report writing.	**Yes**	**No**

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

PARTICIPANT DETAILS (Adolescent):

****The following questions are optional – Please answer to the best of your ability****

1. Age: _____

2. 2. Gender: a) Man b) Woman c) Non-Binary/Non-Conforming e) Prefer not to say

3. Race/Ethnicity: a) White/Caucasian b) Black c) South Asian (i.e. Indian, Pakistani) d) Asian (i.e. Chinese, Filipino) e) Mixed/Other: _____

4. Sexual Orientation: a) Heterosexual b) Bisexual c) Gay/Lesbian e) Prefer not to say f) Other: _____

5. Disability: a) Physical disability b) Sensory Disability c) Autism Spectrum Disorder d) Other: _____

6. Religion/Spirituality: a) Christian (i.e. Catholic) b) Muslim c)Atheist d)Agnostic

e)Jewish f) Hindu or Sikh g) Buddhist

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

LINKS TO FREE COUNSELLING SUPPORT IN IRELAND

Childline - Provides free support and services to children and young people up to the age of 18. Their helpline is open 24 hours every day.

You can contact Childline by: Online chat / Free Phone 1 800 666 666 / Texting the word "Talk" to 50101

Jigsaw: A national centre for youth mental health support. They focus on early interventions to support those aged 12 to 25 years of age.

Jigsaw operates 13 services in communities across Ireland. They offer a place you can visit for free with confidential support from trained mental health professionals. Please visit: Jigsaw.ie

BeLonGTo - A national organisation supporting LGBTQ+ young people ages 14 to 23 in Ireland.

Services include: support for young people and parents, one-to-one chat service, counselling, and drugs and alcohol support services. Services are confidential and free-of-charge. Please visit: Belongto.org