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CYBERBULLYING: A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND PARENTS IN MILTON, VERMONT

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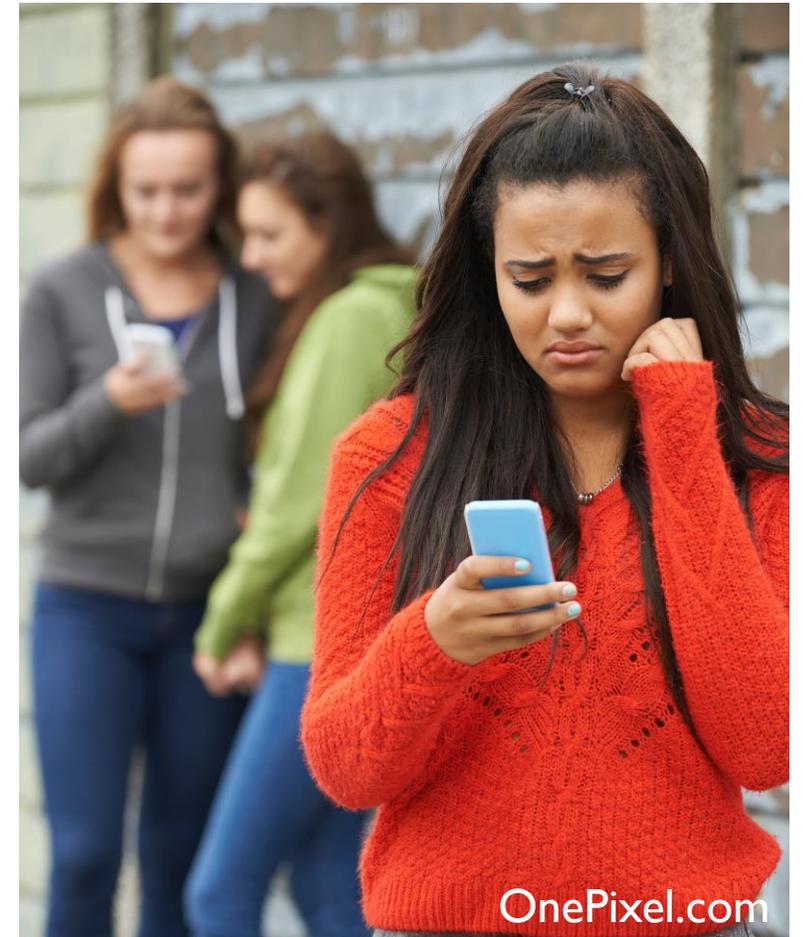THE ROBERT LARNER, M.D. COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

FAMILY MEDICINE CLERKSHIP

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MENTOR: DR. GORDON E. POWERS, MD

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

- Cyberbullying occurs when harmful words or actions by one or more persons are *intentionally* and *repeatedly* directed against another person in the digital world through text message, social media, e-mail, apps, online video games, forums, etc. [2, 3]

- Children and adolescents who experience cyberbullying are at increased risk for the following: [4]

  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Suicidal behavior
  - Substance use
  - Sleep problems
  - Academic struggles

- More than 97% of adolescents in the U.S. are connected to the internet, and about 20 to 40% have experienced cyberbullying at least once in their lives [5]

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are approximately 1,532 children and adolescents ages 5 to 17 living in Milton, VT [6]

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PUBLIC HEALTH COST

Health condition or problem	Prevalence rate			Treatment rate	Cost of treatment per student (18 months)
	Students who are bullied	Students who bully	Bully/ Victim•		
Mental Health disorders	30.83%	9.87%	27.60%	50.60%[i]	$3,567[ii]
Psychosomatic symptoms	17.39%	8.54%	16.93%	3.00% [a]	$609[b,ii]
Headache	16.20%	12.80%	10.70%	62.50%[iii]	$1,472[ii]
Abdominal pain	16.90%	7.60%	14.30%	34.80%[iv]	$609[b,ii]
Alcohol abuse	49.20%	19.50%	36.90%	5.90% [v]	$2,150 [vi]

a. Estimate based on up to two-thirds of children who seek medical treatment for "unexplained" symptoms [14]
b. Based on symptomatic diagnoses

i. Merikangas KR, He JP, Brody D, Fisher PW, Bourdon K, Koretz DS. Prevalence and treatment of mental disorders among U.S. children in the 2001-2004 NHANES. Pediatrics. 2010;125:75-81.
ii. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) Summary Data Tables – Household Component. http://meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data_stats/quick_tables.jsp. Accessed March 2, 2011.
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- Bullying (including cyberbullying) can result in many expected and unexpected public health costs, including:
  - Costs of treating the health-related consequences of bullying (e.g., anxiety, depression, substance use)
  - Costs related to school truancy and drop out
  - Costs related to poor job performance

- It is impossible to predict every way in which bullying will financially impact individuals and society.

- However, according to the Highmark Foundation, the total societal cost of students who bully or who are bullied in high school is **$1,412,995** per individual over a lifetime. [1]

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

- Milton Town School District Faculty Member

  - "We don't have a pamphlet [about cyberbullying] to give out to students and parents."

  - "Students, for whatever reason, struggle with blocking people [on social media]. They continue to invite conflict into their lives."

  - "Stuff happens online outside of school and gets brought in."

- Parent of Milton Elementary School Student

  - "I think it's good to be aware that these things are happening at younger an younger ages now. It's good to know what's out there in the cyberworld."

  - "Having a contact person is key so that you know who to reach out to if you need to have a conversation about incidents of possible cyberbullying."

  - "My spouse and I try to teach our children the difference between kids who are bullies and kids who are just being mean…some kids are mean, but not everything is bullying."

INTERVENTION & METHODOLOGY

- Cyberbullying is common among school-aged children and adolescents in the Milton Town School District, but students and their parents may not know whom to contact or where to find helpful information if they or their child is a victim of cyberbullying

- *Intervention:*

  - Create a pamphlet with information about cyberbullying (including resources for victims of cyberbullying) for children, adolescents, and parents living in Milton, VT

  - Pamphlet will be made available to clinical staff at Milton Family Medicine for distribution to children, adolescents, and parents with questions/concerns about cyberbullying

  - Pamphlet will also be made available to educators at Milton High School, Milton Middle School, and Milton Elementary School for distribution to students and parents with questions/concerns about cyberbullying

- *Methodology:*

  - Follow up with pamphlet recipients at Milton Family Medicine during future office visits to assess the usefulness of the information provided in resolving their question/concern

RESULTS

- The pamphlet has been created and made available to clinical staff at Milton Family Medicine and educators at Milton High School, Milton Middle School, and Milton Elementary School

- Due to the limited length of this clinical clerkship, feedback from pamphlet recipients has not been collected

LIMITATIONS OF INTERVENTION

- Difficult to assess the effectiveness of this intervention in reducing the short-term and long-term costs and health burden of cyberbullying

- Although bullying (including cyberbullying) is addressed at all well-child visits, the relatively low census of office visits dedicated to addressing questions/concerns about cyberbullying specifically may make it difficult to gather sufficient data to evaluate the value of this intervention

- Many recipients may be lost to follow up, making it difficult to assess the usefulness of the information provided in resolving their question/concern

- Many pamphlet recipients may not read the pamphlet or use the information therein to address their question/concern

- Incidents of cyberbullying are most likely underreported by victims of cyberbullying and/or parents of victims

- Children, adolescents, and parents may not understand the definition of bullying (including cyberbullying) and how this differs from another individual just being mean

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS & PROJECTS

- Create a presentation or workshop about cyberbullying to present at local schools or community organizations; include a pre- and post-presentation survey to evaluate the helpfulness of the material presented

- Set up an information booth at local schools during the lunch hour or before/after school to answer students' questions about cyberbullying and/or distribute pamphlets about the topic

- Create a dotphrase about cyberbullying to enable clinical staff at Milton Family Medicine to include information about the topic in patients' after visit summaries

- Design and implement a brief teaching sessions for medical students, residents, and attendings about the clinical significance of cyberbullying

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