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Older Adult Cyber-Bullying: State of Knowledge and Exploring New Lines of Actions.

by
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SUMMARY

For some years now, newspapers and TV news have reported several cases of cyber-bullying involving teenagers. Many of them mentioned that they received e-mails containing hateful messages, were mocked or rumours about them circulating in social media. However, consequences are devastating and cyber-bullying can lead to stress, fear and low self-esteem. Even though cyber-bullying among teenagers receives extensive media coverage, the fact remains that the one experienced by adults and older adults is not well-documented. Still, older adults represent the age group showing the highest growth regarding the use of information and communication technology (ICT) (Government of Canada, 2015; Ministry of Family, 2014a). Some data even showed that older adults have represented the age group with the highest Internet use over the last few years (Statistics Canada, 2014). Older adults were also the age group who devoted most of their time to it (CEFRIIO, 2011). Considering that the ITC use, the adoption of risky practices on social media, time spent on ITCs and that previous victimization represent risk and vulnerability factors of cyber-bullying, we should ask ourselves why if phenomenon is emerging among older adults.

Based on a measure identified in the *Concerted Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Cyber-Bullying 2015-2018* and which is the responsibility of the Research Chair on Mistreatment, this essay aims at assessing the state of current knowledge regarding cyber-bullying and providing updates on a few practices to counter this phenomenon. The first chapter outlines the results of the documentary analysis based on three sources: 1) the 65 briefs submitted after the Anti-Bullying Forum; 2) databases with English and French-speaking scientific content; 3) and literature from governmental sources and agencies. The second chapter sets out our recommendations on areas of intervention, strategies, and best ways and means of action to counter older adult cyber-bullying (Document the phenomenon, prevent, detect situations and intervene to counter older adult cyber-bullying). Finally, the third chapter provides a reflection on the roles and the competencies of the social worker regarding this phenomenon. This reflection was initiated through *the Competency Framework of Social Workers*. These chapters begin by contextualizing the *Concerted Action Plan*, addressing the issue related to older adult cyber-bullying and introducing the methodology used for this essay.

The documentary analysis shows that unlike youth cyber-bullying, the one experienced by older adults is rarely addressed by authors identified in literature reviews. Yet studies have shown that older adults

have experienced cyber-bullying. The results from the study carried out by Sevcikova and Smahel (2009) show that 2.9 % and 1.4 % of participants aged over 50 said that they were mocked, humiliated or hurt on the Internet, respectively several times a year and several times a month. Conversely, it is also interesting to find out that participants aged over 50 also use the Web to humiliate or harass someone (Sevcikova and Smahel, 2009). Although signs of older adult cyber-bullying are difficult to identify, there are reasons to believe, according to literature, that key behaviours experienced by older adults are: being harassed, receiving threatening and hate e-mails or instant messages; receiving derogatory comments and seeing personal and confidential information circulating on the Internet or social media. It is, however, noted that older adult cyber-bullying mainly occurs through social media or e-mails. Just like teenagers, older adults who experience cyber-bullying may have feelings of shame, loss of intimacy, fear and suicidal ideation. Unfortunately, our documentary analysis based on three sources has not allowed us to identify the characteristics of the bully and older adults who are cyber-bullied.

Considering that older adult cyber-bullying is becoming an issue, it goes without saying that, for certain areas of intervention, strategies, and ways and means of action, efforts are made to counter older adult cyber-bullying. Our recommendations are aiming at:

- Documenting the phenomenon of older adult cyber-bullying;
- Preventing the phenomenon by developing tools and awareness strategies which target the population, older adults and various actors involved in countering older adult cyber-bullying;
- Implementing measures to detect cyber-bullying situations and;
- Intervening in these situations, and specifically in adapting service offering to various resources for older adults and to the phenomenon of cyber-bullying and educating older adults on their rights.

Finally, based on the *Competency Framework of Social Workers*, we note that social workers have the abilities and competencies to counter older adult online bullying. Social workers apply an ethical, critical and reflexive practice; their interventions are based on a social intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities; they support partnership, intersystem and professional collaborations and they contribute to the development of the profession. Therefore, issues related to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the context of cyberspace become important elements to address in an academic curriculum of the bachelor and master's degree in Social Work.