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Cyberbullying from students' perspectives -a qualitative study

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Abstract

The subject of cyberbullying is a phenomenon that has increased due to the accessibility internet provides and through modern technologies such as; smartphones, iPads and computers. The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of cyberbullying and prevention strategies among a group of senior high school students. The research questions were: How do the interviewed students experience the extent and the consequences of cyberbullying? What methods and strategies could be used in order to prevent cyberbullying, according to the interviewed students? Four focus groups with students from two senior high schools in Gävle were performed. The results were analyzed from two theoretical perspectives; empowerment and social constructivism. The result showed that the students regarded it important for the schools to involve the students in the prevention work against cyberbullying. The students also described a need of educating teachers about this new phenomena of cyberbullying. Suggestions on how to tackle the issue were made, based on the students' experiences of prevention methods provided by schools.

Key words: Cyberbullying, schools, prevention, strategies, empowerment, norms, Instagram.

Words: 11191

Preamble

I am very grateful to all of the *students* who participated in this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The interest I have for cyberbullying amongst students led me to investigate the topic of cyberbullying further. This interest began when I was active on social media and observed the atmosphere on the internet. I realized then that this new phenomenon is something I would want to investigate and understand better from students' own perspectives. Schools in Sweden have methods to prevent traditional bullying but now when bullying has expanded to a new arena and moved to the internet I also wanted to investigate how students perceive the extent to which the schools had developed their work to prevent cyberbullying and created new methods and strategies.

The Swedish anti-bullying organization Friends is working together with schools in order to prevent bullying. According to United Nations' child convention, every child has the right to feel safe in school. The Swedish Education Act (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800) states in section 5, paragraph 3 that the education should be designed in order for all students to be ensured a safe and calm school environment (ibid). Therefore, schools need to have methods and strategies to prevent bullying (Friends, 2016). The Swedish Education Act (2010:800) also states in section 6, paragraph 6 that schools should work goal oriented in order to counteract violations and harassments of children and young people, paragraph 7 states that schools should work in order to prevent and preclude children and young people from violations and harassments, paragraph 8 indicates that schools each year should do a plan with overview of the counteractions that are needed in order to prevent and preclude violations and harassments of children and young people. The plan should include a review of which interventions are intended to be conducted during the coming year and also a review of how the planned interventions has been performed should be included the next year (ibid).

Bullying can affect children in different ways: such as creating a low self-esteem, mental illness and suicidal thoughts (Alvant, 2009). The outcomes of bullying can also affect the child in the future where she or he will not be motivated to attend school, which can lead to poor performance in (ibid).

According to a study made by Friends, the most common kind of bullying is mean comments, grimaces or facial expressions and physical violations. Some of the physical violations are harassments due to gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity and these are some basic human rights that are being violated (Friends, 2016). Since there are so many negative effects related to bullying on youth's mental health, it is important that schools have strategies and methods to prevent bullying.

1.1 Connection to social work

The matter of cyberbullying is relevant for social work due to the fact that social work often concerns relations between people and also about preventing and dealing with situations where different problems arise. Due to these factors it appears to be of great importance to investigate this subject. Schools were chosen as a relevant arena because bullying in general occurs in schools or at workplaces. This is an important area for social work due to the fact that youth are becoming stressed and depressed or even suicidal as a consequence of cyberbullying (Friends, 2016).

1.2 Aim and research questions

Aim

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of cyberbullying and prevention strategies among a group of senior high school students.

Research questions

- How do the interviewed students experience the extent and the consequences of cyberbullying?
- What methods and strategies could be used by the schools in order to prevent cyberbullying, according to the interviewed students?

1.3 Central concepts

1.3.1 Bullying

Bullying is a term that has various definitions. Pursuant to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013), bullying is defined as a violation of a student's dignity or harassments used as an aim to harm the person. The term bullying is not used by the Swedish National Agency for Education, but it is referred to this term by international researchers. The Swedish National Agency for Education explains that the words, violations and harassments are used to describe cases of bullying rather than using the word bullying (ibid).

Harassment, violation and discrimination are concepts that the Swedish national agency for education uses in order to describe the term bullying (ibid).

Violation is referred to an action or treatment where a student's dignity is violated.

Harassment is when a student is violated due to gender, gender transgressive identity, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and functional limitation. These factors are also referred to as discrimination reasons.

Discrimination is when a student is disfavored due to the discrimination reasons. In order for discrimination to be issued, unequal power must occur between the one that discriminates and the one that is being discriminated (Bywaters, 2012).

1.3.2 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of traditional bullying where technology is used as a tool to embarrass and harm the people that are affected. The technology tools that are used are communication technology such as text messages, emails, and pictures, videos through phones, iPads and computers. Cyberbullying can be verbal and mental in cases when the bullies leaving mean comments on the victim's social media page. These are used as tools to harass and violate and since they enable harassment on a "new" level.

One difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is that the victim of cyberbullying can never leave the bullying arena if they do not choose to disconnect from the internet, the internet involves more people and the bullying is widely spread and the bullying can continue even if the person who are exposed to the bully disconnect from the internet. The bullying can continue because the one who perform the bullying can keep posting things about the person being exposed even if that person disconnect themselves from the internet. You have the possibility to block people or

information that is untrue and you can report if somebody is putting personal information or harassments on social media but the one who bullies you can also remove the information. This makes it important to save the things that the one exposed to cyberbullying discover in order to file a report to the police. On many social media platforms, you can also block a specific account put the problem is that the person who commit the bullying can create a new account and continue the cyberbullying, which makes the situation more complex.

1.3.3 Prevention strategies

It is stated by The Swedish Education Act, section 6, paragraph 8 that schools should each year create a plan in that includes a holistic view of which actions that are needed in order to prevent violations such as bullying (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800). The plan should also include the actions that was planned the year before and how it was performed. The Swedish Education Act, section 6, paragraph 6 also states that schools should work goal oriented in order to prevent harassment and violations of children and youths (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800).

1.3.4 Instagram

Instagram is an app in the social media arena. Instagram is an app where the users can post pictures or short videos and other Instagram users can press on a button and like the picture or the video, the users can also comment the pictures or the video. The users can decide by themselves if they want their pictures and videos to be public or if only visible for accepted users. According to Instagram, they have over 300 million active users each day, over 95 million post per day. Over 80 per cent of their users are from outside the United States and over 4.2 billion likes per day according to their website (Instagram, 2016).

1.4 Essay disposition

The essay is divided in chapters where the first chapter is introduction and about connection to social work, a presentation of research questions and the aim of the study, and also central concepts and ends with essay disposition. Chapter 2 consist of background. The third chapter begins with previous research and then effects of cyberbullying and interventions. The fourth chapter presents the theoretical framework and the two theories used in the study. Chapter five covers methodology where I will present my preliminary understanding, methodological considerations, selection of

students, the interviews, analytical tools, validity and credibility, generalizability, ethical considerations and limitations and criticism. Chapter six consists of result and analysis. Chapter seven covers discussion, discussion of method and further research.

Chapter 2: Background: The schools' responsibilities

According to the Swedish Education Act section 6 paragraph 9 and discrimination law the demands are on the principal to take action and do a report. According to the Swedish Education Act section 6, paragraph 10 the people working in the school has to take action if a student is violated or bullied, which means that the schools are obligated to investigate and prevent the harassments and violations as soon as possible, stated in the Swedish Education Act from 2016 (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800).

The teachers or other people working in schools have a responsibility to report to the principal of the school if they gain awareness of a student being bullied. The Swedish Education Act also states that the school should aim to work with the best interest of the child as a starting point and create an environment that is calm and safe. Harassments and violations related to schools should be investigated by schools (ibid).

A mean comment on someone's page on social media can be shared by many others on the internet which leads to harmful consequences for that person. Dispersion effect on the internet becomes an important factor where the bullies can reach extreme lengths with their aim to violate and harass (Wennington, 2016).

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare states that schools have a responsibility to report to the social welfare board according to the Swedish Social Services Act, chapter 14 paragraph 1, schools have an obligation to take notice if they suspect or get knowledge about a child being abused or in risk of being harmed (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2014).

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare states that the concept of a child being abused and in risk of being harmed has a broad definition and includes all forms of violations, neglect and exploitation that can lead to potential or actual harm to the child's health or development. The concept includes both if there is a risk that the child

will be harmed in their home environment or in school environment, and children and young people that are exposed to harassment and other violations such a threat, violence and sexual exploitations from other children and young people of the same age (ibid).

Chapter 3: Previous research

In this section I have decided to divide the previous research in themes that are common or reoccurring in the studies I have found on the subject cyberbullying. Two recurring themes which are relevant for this study are: *effects of cyberbullying* and *interventions*.

Regarding the phenomenon of cyberbullying, I am from a generation where I have experienced how bullying has expand to new arena, from being in the school yard to the internet. I grew up in a time where technology has developed and internet has become a tool in schools, workplaces and for communication in general. Through social media and the internet information is accessible on a broader level than before. We can share information and communicate with each other in a way that was not possible before the internet.

I searched for journals and articles that were related to the subject of cyberbullying by searching for words such as cyberbullying among youths, bullying, violations on the net, methods by schools to prevent bullying, and effect of cyberbullying. I searched for these words on google, google scholar and discovery.

3.1 Effects of cyberbullying

The previous research that was found emphasize the effects of cyberbullying and the consequences that emerge because of it. Pursuant to the studies, cyberbullying can have a great impact on students' lives and well-being and on their future. The students in the studies discuss the level of harm that emerges from cyberbullying and the difference in the methods that are used to harass, violate and discriminate.

According to the previous studies, the different methods of cyberbullying can evoke many emotions such as; depression, embarrassment, fright and anger. These emotions are described to become more harmful due to the internet having a wider audience which contributes to more people having access to personal information about the victim which leads to more shame and embarrassment (Frisen, Slonje & Smith, 2012).

In a report made by Friends (Friends, 2016) it is stated that boys and girls are being exposed to cyberbullying in different platforms on the internet. Most boys are, according to this report, experiencing bullying or sexual harassment's when playing games online while girls are being exposed to the harassments or bullying on social media. The report by Friends is an online report with the aim to highlight the voice of youth and children concerning cyberbullying. The report was conducted through webbased surveys. Totally 1050 children and youth participated in study, 423 of 1050 were between the ages of 10-12 and 592 were 13-16 years old. 49 per cent were girls and 51 per cent were boys.

According to Gillander (2012) sexual harassment among youth occurs very often that it is becoming normalized behavior among youths. Gillander has conducted a study with the aim to understand young girls' experiences of peer sexual harassment. The study was carried out in an elementary school in northern Sweden where Gillander performed six focus groups. The pupils of these focus groups were girls in grade 1-6.

Berne, Frisen and Kling investigated the experiences of appearance related cyberbullying among adolescents, twenty-seven adolescents participated in the interviews and they were divided into four focus groups. According to Berne, Frisén and Kling, (2014) it is most common that girls are exposed to harassments concerning their looks and also that judgment's concerning looks are more important to girls, which also lead to girls who are being exposed to harassments regarding their looks become more depressed and their self-esteem becomes lower, while boys do not seem to care as much.

Collberg and Ekman (2012) discuss the harms and effects that cyberbullying from a school nurse perspective. Seven nurses participated in this study. The nurses in the study state that cyberbullying destroys the self-image and well-being of the students who are exposed to this phenomenon. The study further emphasizes the experiences of the school nurses regarding students that have exposed others or been exposed to cyberbullying. It is shown that students develop feelings such as worry, unease and sadness which in worst cases would lead to depression and anxiety. This study also describes that cyberbullying has an impact on the perpetrator i.e. the one that practices the cyberbullying (Collberg & Ekman, 2012). The students in the study expressed that

they were afraid and lonely, some of them were either bullied or sought to take revenge and some were afraid due to the fear of being caught. Anxiety emerges when these students regret their action since the cyberbullying is different than bullying due to the internet being wide and it is difficult to erase something from the internet. The consequences for the students were feeling sad, annoyed and angry with themselves (ibid).

3.2 Interventions

Another previous study about the subject cyberbullying is Notar, Padgett and Roden's work (2013) where they focus on interventions. According to the study, schools should define the term bullying in order to understand bullying because it can include different form of violations. For instance, if the term bullying includes physical violence, mean comments, facial expression and harassments. When the concept is defined by schools and teachers, only then can intervention programs be created which lead to policies and consequences being implemented. The authors further discuss that the school personnel should be informed about the phenomena in order to develop strategies, locate the areas where the bullying takes place, create support groups and encourage other students that witness the bullying to take action. Different approaches of what students should do when they are in vulnerable positions are presented in the study. Students are encouraged to save the material that can be used as evidence when exposed to cyberbullying such as pictures, text messages, videos etc. (Notar, Padgett & Roden, 2013).

The organization Friends provides different methods and strategies for schools in order to prevent bullying. Friends suggest that schools should improve their anti-bullying work by engaging the students and make them participate in the work against bullying. Friends further discuss that schools in Sweden mostly focus on finding an explanation of why certain situations emerge. According to Friends, the Swedish schools are often putting too much emphasize on the individual perspective and Friends suggest that schools should instead have a holistic view of the matter and analyze the situation from several perspectives (Friends, 2016).

Studies made by Friends shows that the students are usually not involved in the support system, which is the work that the schools do in order to prevent bullying. According to

Friends, the starting point should be that the students should engage and be involved in formulating the problem and the prevention work against bullying and also evaluation of the work against bullying made by schools (Friends, 2016) In sum, it is important for schools to have policies that are enforced, staff that are well educated regarding cyberbullying and inform parents and legal caregivers about this phenomenon (Notar, Padgett & Roden, 2013).

Chapter 4: Theoretical framework

Charmaz (2006) explains that the researcher should be as a “bland sheet” when conduction the interviews and that the theories are developed after coding the collected data. I was able to connect to theories after that the collected data had been transcribed and patterns had been found and developed into themes.

I will use social constructivism as theoretical perspective, social constructivism is applicable on this study due to the fact that this study is based on experiences and emotions. I will use also use Empowerment theory to analyze the data.

4.1 Social constructivism

The theory of social constructivism brings up the human construction of reality. Payne (2005) argues that we all have our own constructions of reality and this is influenced by other people’s perceptions as well. Payne explains social constructivism as a theory that proposes that people define, explain and interpret the world around them as part of the interchange between people and their context from a cultural, historical and social perspective (Payne, 2005).

Social constructions of reality focus on the social constructions that are in common, contribute to socialization of individuals into society and social groups within the society, and when the social ideas become standard and shared to the extent that they become a form of reality to the people taking part in that society (Payne, 2005). For example, we categorize and sort things and this can vary between different societies and cultures.

Goffman (2014) discusses that every society decides what peculiarities that are useful when categorizing people and what peculiarities that are understand as normal and

natural for the members of each category. Berger and Luckman (1966, in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p 88) argue that:

"Roles are very important to the construction of the individuals, because they internalize and together they form a holistic self, a subject"

We as humans construct different roles for other and for ourselves. We need these roles in order to develop our self and for humans to become a subject. Signs such as symbols and language are described as "objectivations". Through language, experiences and meaning, humans gain knowledge that are stored in memory of individuals and also shared and communicated between individuals (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

"We create all the time in our social relations, new habits and routines in our actions, as well as new categories in our observation of others and their actions"

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966 in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p 86)

4.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is a relatively new concept of social work (Payne, 2005) and it is related to participation of individuals and communities in taking control of decision and actions over their lives and self-help. By gaining power over decisions and actions that concerns one's self's life the effect will be reduced social or personal blocks to exercising existing power, self-confidence to use power and also increasing capacity (Payne, 2005).

Empowerment practice helps the client in from both an individualistic and from a group perspective to battle social barriers to self-fulfillment within the existing social structures (Payne, 2005).

Another important aspect of empowerment is the area of practice that has been to assist self-help groups to develop, by supporting groups of people who share the same problem to come together in order to support each other. This empowers the people in these groups by creating new responses and ideas about suitable services (Payne 2005).

According to Jack (1995) empowerment is paradoxical due to whom the power is given from, and for example if the power is given from an organization or an individual they

have to give it from a powerful position. Empowerment seeks to help people challenge oppression and making it possible for people to take charge of the matters which affect them (Payne, 2005). Starrin (Askheim & Starrin, 2010) discuss the term emotional energy. Starrin argue that situations or context where we feel right fill us with emotional energy such as enthusiasm, solidarity and self-reliance. However, some situations and contexts can also drain us from emotional energy and create a sense of powerless and dulls (Askheim & Starrin 2010).

Starrin continues arguing that when we feel powerless and have a low self-esteem it is more difficult for us to feel a sense of belongingness and solidarity with other people. Starrin state that power and emotions are therefore connected (ibid).

Empowerment theory will be applied in order to analyze the collected data. This approach is regarded as appropriate in order to see what strategies and methods that the schools are using from the students' perspectives.

Chapter 5: Method

5.1. Preliminary understanding

I had basic knowledge which I had gained from school and from reading newspapers and different kinds of media. Cyberbullying has been a subject discussed in media in Sweden due the difficulties in pressing charge against the bullies and specifically when it occurs on the net. I have been active on social media and have observed how the atmosphere and attitude are on social media.

5.2 Methodological considerations

In the beginning of this study we were two researchers, we created a research guide together and decided the aim and created the research questions together. The methods that were chosen were also a decision made of us together. We collected the data jointly and both transcribed the performed interviews. During the process of this study we made a decision of splitting up and write on our own. Therefore, I am using the term

“we” in those parts where we worked together and the term “I” in those parts that I conducted on my own.

A qualitative method was chosen due to the fact that it gives a more in depth perspective of the phenomena. The aim of choosing a qualitative approach was to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding concerning cyberbullying. By conducting the interviews or discussions with semi-structured questions the focus groups had opportunity and possibility to elaborate and develop their answers and discuss it with each other within the group.

The study was inspired by grounded theory, which indicates that the researcher should be regarded as a “blank sheet” with no prejudices or pre-interpretation concerning the subject.

According to Charmaz:

“Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves”. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2)

This method/approach is appropriate since this phenomenon of cyberbullying is a new concept; there are no theories that can explain it. This approach gives the researcher the opportunity to start from scratch and find data that will be theorized during the process. Face to face interviews combined with audio recording were used. This is recommended because the researcher can focus on listening and be active during the interview instead of writing as the recorded data later will be transformed to written form (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

5.3 Selection of students

In order to find students, two senior high schools located in Gävle were contacted. The students in the focus groups were chosen from different classes in order to gain a holistic view. We contacted three of the biggest senior high schools in Gävle and two of them responded back. We then contacted six different teachers, two of each schools but only two schools had possibility to meet.

To select the students, we used a class list. Before we saw the list we had selected six numbers, the teacher matched the name and the number on the list. The teacher new then names, however we were never told. At one point when this method was used, only girls were selected so we reselected new numbers. We wanted to gain an understanding from both male and female interviewees and also investigate the norms of the group. Four focus groups were conducted, each group consisted of 4 to 6 students.

The decision that 4-6 Students per group was preferred was made due to consideration of the sensitivity regarding this subject. Wibeck suggest that “a focus groups should not be less than four and not more than six persons” (2010, p 62). Wibeck (2010) highlight that if a group includes more than six persons, there will be a risk of subgroups being created within the focus group.

Svedberg (1992 in Wibeck, 2010) states that some of the features of a small group are that it gives the individuals a sense of influence and unity. Wibeck (2010) argues that a small group gives each participant a large part of living-space and that each member of a group takes a part of that living-space which means that the more participants of a group lead to smaller part of the living-spere.

We wanted the respondents to be in the ages of 18-19 and from the same student group, since it might make them more comfortable being in a group where they knew each other. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, it could also be a disadvantage if they felt that they had to be restrictive of the information that they shared due to that they knew each other from earlier experiences. However, the students had the possibility to decide by themselves how much information that they wanted to reveal. The interviews were about 40-50 minutes each. Each focus group were given a couple of topics do discuss. We prepared a couple of topics connected to the research questions and aim of this study. The students were given one topic at the time. When we noticed that the students sounded done with the discussion they were given a new topic. The different topics had a specific order because we wanted their discussion to get a specific flow. The first topics covered their internet habits and after that we had some topics covering what methods and strategies that are being used by the school.

The results of this study is based on interviews conducted with students from two different senior high schools in Gavle and therefore it is important to be aware that these findings may not be related to schools in other areas.

5.4 The interviews

The interviews were conducted in Swedish since we wanted the students to be able to express their experiences in the language that they felt comfortable in. The students could also get support from each other. Wibeck (2010) states that the advantage of focus groups is that the interviewees have the opportunity during the interview to ask each other questions and therefore develop their thoughts regarding the discussed subject but it can also be a disadvantage because the students can might be restrictive of what they want to share with the focus groups because they know each-other from before (ibid). We chose this method specifically because this method is of advantage when studying opinions, emotions and thoughts concerning a specific matter such as cyberbullying (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The interviews were approximately around 40 minutes to 1 hour. It is common in focus groups that one of the students acts as a leader (Wibeck, 2000), but in this study there was no specifically chosen leader. However, in one of the focus groups two people lead the discussion and spoke substantially more than the other two. As interviewers we noticed that in all of the focus groups, the students tried to involve each other in the conversation. The students that spoke more did tried to include the other students in the discussion.

5.5 Analytical tools

In analysis the focus is on specific themes connected to the interviews and the interview guide. By using this method and categorize the findings will perhaps lead to material that conforms to the research questions and aim of this thesis. Patton (2002) describes it as thematic analysis which is when different contexts are analyzed in order to be categorized into different themes. After transcribing the interviews, I could find a pattern in the findings and from this pattern three themes were developed. Lantz (2013) states that by categorizing the answers and split the content of the interviews in to different parts, which have been given summarizing names, the interviewer will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the details which found the whole. I used these themes in order to analyze the result of my findings.

“The task is now to juxtapose the data in a way that makes it possible to reflect and abstract around the dimensions” (Lantz, 2013, p 157)

5.6 Validity and credibility

The validity of a study depends on how well the findings are in connection to the aim (Grinnell, 2005). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) explain that validity also implicate whether the chosen method measures what was intended to be measured or not. In order to increase the validity of this research we created an interview guide. Wibeck (2010) argue that the moderator should design an interview guide and in cases were the moderator want to steer the interview and use structured focus groups, then the questions should be specified. According to Krueger (1980 in Wibeck, 2010) five types of different questions should be included; opening questions, introduction questions, crossing questions, key-questions and ending questions. Wibeck (2010) continues arguing that in cases when the moderator choses to use unstructured focus groups it can be beneficial if the interview guide consist of broad topics. Wibeck (2010) states that the moderator should only interfere with questions in cases when a subject is in risk of being lost or if it becomes quiet for a long time. Due to the interview guide we could reformulate or modify questions in order to get rich description and deeper answers.

After the first interview we made small modifications to the interview guide such as excluding some questions which the researcher found to be irrelevant for the aim of this research and then added questions which the researchers thought was relevant for the study.

In order to increase validity, follow up questions were asked and the interviewees were also asked to evolve unclear statements which were also documented. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in a calm environment which the interviewees were familiar with in order to not disturb the interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The credibility of a study can be referred as how trustworthy a study has been throughout the research and how trustful it is (Grinnell, 2005). The researcher can use

reliability and validity in order to carefully study the phenomena during the research (Payne, 2009). The interviews were conducted in school in order for them to be in an environment where the students would be comfortable and feel secure. The interviewers also informed the students of the focus groups about confidentiality. Before interviews were conducted, we sat down and had a casual conversation with students in order to build a comfortable atmosphere.

5.7 Trustworthiness

Another important aspect in order to gain high validity is reflexive subjectivity, which means that we as researchers have to reflect upon our own assumptions and accomplishments (Grinell, 2005). I have reflected upon my own assumptions together with my co-student in order to understand and get inputs about my own values and reflections.

I were aware that my beliefs may impact the research process; that I could be affected by my own biases. Due to that I tried to be aware of them during the process of this research in order to prevent them from hinder the process. There is a possibility that other researchers who should make the same study using the same questions would get another result. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that reliability refers to consistency and trustworthiness of the findings of the research.

5.8 Generalizability

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) discuss how to generalize due to personal experiences. In this study I used the interviews from four focus groups as standpoint. I consider that the experiences that these four focus groups shared, provided a sense of how they experienced their “truth”. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describes generalizability as “The extent that findings in one situation can be transferred to other situations” (p.324). It is difficult to generalize these findings to a wider context because of the few interviewees.

5.9 Ethical considerations

Since this study concerns a sensitive topic it is important to protect the students’ anonymity and confidentiality. However, it is difficult to ensure the students full anonymity as they all are aware of each other's statements and participation.

The interviewees were provided with a letter of consent before each interview in order to ensure them their rights. They were provided with information regarding their right to withdraw the research during any stage (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The students were fully informed about the importance to guarantee the confidentiality of the other students in the focus groups (Wibeck, 2010). They were also informed that their identities are kept anonymous in order to make them feel secure. We wanted them to be ensured that their views or experiences will not affect them in their private life (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The students were informed that the only ones that will have access to the information are the interviewers. However, the interviewees were fully aware that it was not possible to ensure that members of the group will not reveal any information which they gained from participating in the interviews.

The transcriptions and audio recordings have been handled with carefulness in order to maintain confidentiality (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). No names are mentioned or revealed in the transcriptions and the students were given codenames such as A1, A2 A3 etc. The students were informed that it is important for them to be aware of their rights to share their experiences to the limit they desire and not feel that their private life is violated (Wibeck, 2010).

5.10 Limitations and Criticism

One of the difficulties raised during the research process was to find previous research conducted in Sweden concerning cyberbullying among the age group chosen. Most of the previous research was about cyberbullying among younger students and children in other parts of the world. Research conducted on the subject cyberbullying per se was difficult since the published studies and research covers bullying in a general perspective.

Another limitation was the time. During the process of contacting the schools, many obstacles emerged during the process, such as principals and teachers not being available. The timeline was not enough to make calls, send emails to all the schools the researchers wanted to. The research plan could have been planned better and in a more

realistic way, perhaps the plan for this study was too optimistic regarding time. It was very time-consuming to organize the interviews because the students had many examinations and national tests which limited the time line. Some of the students that participated in the interviews had to take time from their spare time and were not able to participate during school time.

Another obstacle was to find the age group that fit the criteria that had been chosen. Some of the schools that had been selected did not consider the age limit that was set, which put the study on hold due to a reselection of new students from other classes for the interviews. Some teachers required us to go to the schools in order to present the aim with the study which was time consuming.

Language is an important tool when conducting this kind of research, therefore the transcription process was more time consuming than predicted because the researchers had to translate and transcribe from Swedish to English. Some expressions of the students' experiences were lost in the translations and transcriptions which we as researchers were aware of.

We realized during the interviews that we had needed more structure on how we divided the time between the interviewees. Some of the interviewees would talk more about their experiences which lead to other interviewees not being able to talk about their experiences at all. This could perhaps be a result of our selection method. Wibeck (2010) argues that it can be beneficial to use already existing groups. We were not aware if the selected students used to associate with each other on their spare time. Wibeck continues arguing that one premise is that people who have common experiences or interest are willing to share personal information and opinions with each other in larger extent than people who met for the first time.

The aim with the interviews was to not be involved in the discussion since we did not want to influence their experience; however, this hindered us when some interviewees spoke more than others.

However, one critique against the choice to do interviews with focus groups are that the anonymity cannot be promised by the researcher due to the participant not having

signed confidentiality consent toward each other. It is only the interviewers who have promised confidentiality consent towards the interviewees.

Chapter 6: Results and Analysis

In this chapter the findings of the interviews and the analysis of the collected data are presented. The data is analyzed with the chosen theories and connected to previous research. The codes and categories that emerged during the transcription process will be presented. Six themes were found in the collected data; *definitions of cyberbullying, anxiety, lack of support in schools, important to involve the students in the prevention work, the schools' responsibility for taking action against cyberbullying and the teachers not aware of the extent of cyberbullying.*

The students were all users of social media. Common for the students was that a majority of them had similar internet habits and therefore also similar experiences of cyberbullying.

6.1 How do the interviewed students experience the extent and the consequences of cyberbullying?

It emerged from the discussions in the focus groups that most of the students were members of different social media communities and accessed them almost every day. Many of the students were online on internet a couple of hours every day. Some of the students also told that they were online during school due to the accessibility to internet in school.

Definition of cyberbullying

The definition of cyberbullying was a reoccurring subject that the students discussed. Common for the groups was that many of them differentiated between traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

"I think that cyberbullying is when you feel exploit or uncomfortable somewhere on the internet"

(Student C1)

“For me cyberbullying is repeated, mean comments through chat conversations or other ways” (Student B3)

“Cyberbullying is when a group of people are mean towards a specific person it becomes cyberbullying, for instance when a group of people are arguing with one person it becomes too much.” (Student A2)

One of the students referred to cyberbullying as unequal power balance, which can be related to traditional face to face bullying. He/she described that the victim has no power while the bullies do and that the one who are exposed to bullying are the one that has to defend themselves and prove that they are being a victim of bully.

“Cyberbullying gives a totally different power” (Student A1)

The students expressed that there is less of the traditional bullying and more of cyberbullying since it is easier to be anonymous on the internet. The students of the study referred to cyberbullying as a digital form where one’s integrity is violated for instance by mean comments or someone put up pictures of you without permission, stealing someone’s video.

“I think that it is bullying when you feel exposed or uncomfortable somewhere on cyberspace. Either because you are there and people are mean or that you observe things that are racism or sexism” (Student A3)

“I think that cyberbullying is when you feel exploited or uncomfortable somewhere on the internet” (Student B1)

What we define as cyberbullying is subjective but it is also connected to the view of society on cyberbullying (Berger & Luckman, 1966 in Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). The norms in society define what is accepted and what is unaccepted. Most of the students had common views of cyberbullying which reflect that there is a common view in society on the definition of cyberbullying, however this may be depending on which age group that defines the term cyberbullying. If people from a generation where these technologies were not developed the definition would might differ because they relate to the issue differently.

Experiences of cyberbullying

It also emerged from the interviews that many of the students had experiences of cyberbullying, not only personal experience but experiences from observing other people being exposed to cyberbullying. One of the focus groups discussed social media and what kind of feelings these platforms evoke.

A couple of students explained that they felt that social media was very superficial and that it evokes stress and anxiety. They explained further that it is superficial on apps such as; Instagram. As described, Instagram is an app in the social media sphere where one only post a picture or videos, and other people that are connected to Instagram can press a button and like the picture or video. The students' connected super-fiction much to this app due to the experience that people only post pictures or videos of themselves in order to gain most likes. Therefore, a hunt of getting most likes on ones' photo or video on Instagram becomes a competition that creates anxiety and stress.

The students discussed these feelings of anxiety and stress in relation to the superficial sphere that is created in the social media app- Instagram.

“This thing with Instagram pictures and likes, you only post pictures of when you are having fun or look good. I think it spread jealousy because when someone have many likes then you sit there and think that that person seems to have so much fun meanwhile you are at home and bored, this can evoke feelings of loneliness. You only put out picture of your best side all the time and therefore it creates a lot of pressure.”

(Student A1)

“Everybody feels the need of showing people their best side, and they deny their less good side in order to show how perfect they are. They need to put a lot of effort into it for them who spend a lot of time on social media”

(Student A3)

A child or young person who is bullied are carrying a lot of stress and this can affect their study result and even be a reason for drop outs. Children and young persons exposed to cyberbullying during a longer period e.g. several months or longer can lose their sense of context and that can lead to a risk of exclusion and drop out of schools (Alvant, 2009).

The students explained that they thought that the one who is being exposed to bullying is in a vulnerable position and that is has to be recognized:

“There are many people that believe that it is not a violation when one comments something bad on someone’s photo. It is easier to get away with bullying on the internet. For example, someone can say: you used to be much prettier before, you look okay now but you were prettier before. They try to disguise the insult with a complement” (Students B1)

” Cyberbullying is even worse because everybody can see what is happening, for instance in case of traditional bullying there is a group of people that can see what is happening but when it is on the internet, then everybody can see what happening and everyone who have access to the internet and Facebook and this can lead to even more bullying”. (Student C1)

Goffman (1986) discusses that society categorizes us to different groups and the belongingness to each group is based on our specific features Goffman (1986) continues discussing how the first appearance is likely to activate us to anticipate the classification and attributes. The image that you show of you and your life on social media apps such as Instagram divides you into a specific category. This can create stress and depression, it becomes a competition of who are the most perfect and have the most perfect lives.

Berger and Luckmann (1966, in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) discuss that we constantly create new habits and routines in our actions. By observing others in action we develop new categories. These categorization and habits are communicated between different people or actors and then becomes set thought- and action-patterns. From a social constructivist perspective one could say that society is in general putting a lot of stress on young people due to the norms that are built within the society. The ideal that is in society did even before internet put a lot of stress on young people but the new norms that society have created on the internet which are unrealistic and evokes feeling of stress and anxiety. These norms are preventing girls and boys to be who they are and it all creates more pressure and stress for these students. Even though these norms differ due to gender for instance girls being more violated on social media apps connected to super-fiction and boys being harassed on platforms connected to gaming. The norms of the society are reflected on the internet.

6.2 What methods and strategies could be used in order to prevent cyberbullying, according to the interviewed students?

Lack of support in school

A reoccurring theme in the focus groups was the lack of support the students experienced regarding cyberbullying. The students expressed that when a student was a victim of cyberbullying the teachers did not provide the support that the victim needed. However, the opinions concerning prevention work and school's methods in cases of cyberbullying, were divided. Some of the students thought that if it did not occur during school then the schools should not have any responsibility to act while others thought that schools had a responsibility to act even though it did not occur during school time or in school area.

During the discussion several students explained what information the schools provided the students with concerning methods and strategies in the work against bullying and where the student could go for help if they were victims of cyberbullying:

“The schools have some kind of form which the students can fill in” (Student C3)

“There is some kind of information at the school website, but it is mainly about traditional bullying” (Student B3)

“There is not much that they can do except that they need to take it more seriously” (Student C1)

Based on the comments above it seems as the actual schools do not take enough action against cyberbullying. The lack of information may reflect the view schools have on cyberbullying. From a social constructivist perspective one could say that since the schools has the form which you can fill in, it shows that it is important enough to highlight but not important to take actions against or to find concrete solutions to the problem. According to the interviewed students almost all of them had experiences of cyberbullying in some context and yet the schools do not provide much information about it and do not provide with much help in order to tackle it. Cyberbullying is perhaps normalized. According to Berger and

Luckmann (1966, in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) our world view is confirmed through conversation but mostly through what we do not say. By not talking about cyberbullying enough, the norm that is created in society is perhaps that cyberbullying is silently accepted in society.

Important to involve students in prevention work

According to the method used by the anti-bullying organization Friends (2016) schools should involve the students in the prevention work against bullying. Understood from the interviews, the students did not feel involved in the prevention work in their schools. By involving the students, the schools would be able to empower them in matters that actually affect them. A common view among the students were that they were not sure about what kind of help they could expect from the schools and those who turned to the teachers did not perceive the response from teachers as supportive.

“I do not have any experience of teachers checking on different websites, I do not know if I think that it is their responsibility, but it has to be somebody’s. But I do not feel that the teachers have brought it up” (Student A3)

“I know what answer that I would receive from the teachers. If I would have turned to them they would tell me to go to the welfare officer instead” (Student D4)

“They usually start the semester by talking a bit about bullying but it is not more than that” (Student D3)

According to Payne (2005) empowerment is aiming to give people power to affect decisions that’s concerns them. By including the student in prevention work, the schools would empower them and provide the students with possibilities to affect their own situation. By giving including the students, the students will be able to create strategies in order to tackle situations of cyberbullying and also learn what outcomes cyberbullying can have. The schools would also be able to learn what the student’s point of view are concerning cyberbullying. Together they can create methods and strategies that are accepted and implemented by both schools and students. And by empowering also built trust between teachers and students in order to ease for the students to seek help when needed.

The schools' responsibilities for taking action against cyberbullying

The students discussed what kind of responsibility the schools have in order to prevent and work against bullying. The students also discussed if the schools have any responsibility concerning the matter of preventing bullying and take action when bullying occurs among all students around the ages of 15-19. The students were not sure if the schools should take action when bullying occurs on spare time and outside of school area.

"I don't know if the school should be responsible of helping, because it may occur on spare time" (Student A1)

"If the issue is occurring during school then I think that the school has e certain responsibility to act, but if the problem occurs outside school and on spare-time then schools should not need to involve" (Student A1)

In the report made by Friends (2016) one of the reasons why students and also teachers and other people working in the school do not talk about or highlight cyberbullying is because they might not feel like it is concerning the school because it happens on spare time and they are not aware of the responsibility of the school and the rights of the students. If it occurs in the students, spare time as cyberbullying often does, it might seem more natural to talk to another adult for example the parents, regardless of when the cyberbullying occurs. One important aspect is how it affect the student. Even if it occurs outside school it can affect the students' school attendance which then becomes an issue connected to schools. By empowering the students in ways as including the students in the dialogue connected to cyberbullying and allow the students to be involved in building methods and strategies, the students will able to use this knowledge as working tools and have an impact on their situation. They would gain knowledge of what cyberbullying is, who has responsibility to take action and what can be done in order to tackle the situation. They would also gain knowledge about what to do if they observe bullying. By empowering students, it might lower the risk of bullying among adults at workplaces in the future because they already learn how to tackle it.

The teachers not aware of the extent of cyberbullying

Another common theme was that the teachers did not seem to know the extent of cyberbullying. The students did not think that the teachers had enough knowledge about the issue and that they are from a generation that has not experienced this kind of dilemmas and situations that internet can cause. The students argued that the teachers need education in the subject of cyberbullying in order to get an understanding about it.

“The teachers are from another generation; they do not know how affected the victim becomes” (Student C1)

“The teachers should be educated about cyberbullying in order to tackle it” (Student A4)

“There is a new generation that are growing up in this technological environment, teachers need to learn and be educated in order to understand this generation. Cyberbullying is something new and teachers and other adults needs to get information about it” (Student C4)

“Teachers do not understand much about cyberbullying and how much harm it can cause, they should be educated” (Student C2)

Based on the comments from the interviewed students, this issue of teachers being unaware of the extent of cyberbullying among students, could be connected to age. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966 in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) experiences and knowledge are stored in memory of individuals and between individuals. The teachers who are grown up in a time where technologies were not as developed as today might have difficulties with relating to this issue of cyberbullying because they have no memories or experiences of cyberbullying and therefore they cannot understand it fully. Reality is constructed differently due to age.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of cyberbullying among a group of high school students. Important results from my point of view of the formulation of the problem are further discussed below. The students of this study reflected on their own experiences of cyberbullying and discussed the matter of cyberbullying. It became clear from the results that many of the students did not know what kind of responsibility the schools had or where to get the information.

In order to understand this phenomenon, we need to understand the root of it. During this study it became clear to me that we have created these norms. We are born into the norms that society has set up. According to the interviewed students almost all of them had experiences of cyberbullying either personal experiences or observational experiences. If an event is reoccurring it will become a rule, if mean comments occur very often on the social media sphere then it will become natural and we will not give attention to it. Perhaps cyberbullying has become normalized, that is does not seem to bother us anymore, perhaps we have accepted mean comments and view it as a risk that everyone who are users of social media has to take? Maybe that is the reason why schools do not highlight cyberbullying more?

As mentioned earlier in this study, the National Board of Health and Welfare states that schools have a responsibility to report to the Social Welfare Board in cases where they suspect or get knowledge about a child being abused or in risk of being harmed (Swedish Social Services Act ,14 chap 1 §).

The concept of being abused or in risk of harm includes children and young people who are exposed to harassment and other violations such a threat, violence and sexual exploitations from other children and young people of the same age (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2014). Is the view on cyberbullying too negligent? Perhaps if the schools would change their attitude and take it very seriously and report even cases of cyberbullying the attitude would transmit to the students.

Many of the students also explained that they did not know what to do if they would be exposed to cyberbullying. Some of the students also said that they did not think that they would receive help other than being referred to go to welfare officers. By

empowering the students in such was as involving the students and including them in the prevention work against cyberbullying and in the process of setting up methods and strategies it would give the students a sense of trust that the teacher would be able to handle a situation connected to cyberbullying. And it would also educate both students and teachers about what consequences cyberbullying could have on one's life. It would perhaps send out a signal to the students putting other through violations and abuse will be harmful to the person exposed but will also lead to a consequence for the one who are performing the bully. If the schools involve the students in the prevention work, the students would also be aware of what the definition of bullying is and become aware of the responsibility that the school has both in school and outside of school.

Another favorable aspect from involving the students could be that the schools could get knowledge about how the students think that the schools should act in cases of bullying such as not moving the person who are being exposed to bully both traditional and cyber. Perhaps the schools would not act as they do if they knew that the students perceive it as schools are giving punishment to the student who have been or are exposed to bully.

By empowering the students and include them in the actions that are taken in order to prevent cyberbullying and involve the students in the making of methods and strategies, maybe we can change the attitude connected to cyberbullying and also break the norm.

The students also discussed that the attitudes are even harsher in the lower ages who are growing up with these technologies such as iPad's, smartphones and computers which makes it even more important that we educate teachers today and future teachers about cyberbullying and what impact it can have on one's life.

In conclusion, schools should set up strategies and methods in order to prevent bullying because bullying can be very harmful to children and youths. In order for children and youths to develop and feel safe they need to be in calm and safe environment. The schools are obligated to create these strategies and preventions against bullying and they are obligated to report to the National Board of Health and Welfare when a child is in risk of being in harm or are being abused. Then schools should include the students if the aim is to protect the students from bullying, and by including the students, the schools would empower the students by giving the students the power to affect

decisions that are affecting them. By empowering and highlighting the issue of cyberbullying, the society can battle the norms and break the norms that society has set up connected to cyberbullying.

7.2 Discussion of method

We chose to have discussions in focus groups where the participants discussed different topics related to research questions and aim of the study. Due to time limitation and the aim of this study four focus groups was what was possible for us to manage. The students came from two different schools and each group consisted of 4-6 Students. We did not choose groups that was already existing which Wibeck (2010) argues are beneficial instead, we created a group from each class. Perhaps the information from each focus group would have been richer if we had chosen to use existing groups, i.e. sub-groups, who were more familiar with each other.

It was challenging to find teachers who were willing to co-operate because most students had national tests during the same time. Students did not want to take time from their school breaks or spare time and therefore the teachers had to let the students participate during lecture.

I believe that the participants felt that they could speak openly due to it being a discussion and they did not need to reveal personal information if they were not comfortable with it. The two theories that were chosen; empowerment and social constructivism, gave the desired support.

7.3 Further research

There are some suggestions for further research concerning this subject. One suggestion of further research is to investigate the teacher's point of view of the methods and strategies in prevention work against cyberbullying in order to understand if students are not involved in the making of the prevention work against bullying, and if teachers lack knowledge of the extent of bullying, and if teachers lack knowledge of the extent of cyber bullying. To what extent are the teachers given the right tools to work against cyber bullying??

The other suggestion is to investigate this phenomena from a parental perspective. What support do they get, in what ways are they involved, what kind of support to they get?

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Appendix

Interview questions:

1. Hur är era internet vanor?
2. Vad gör ni när ni surfar om ni surfar?
 - Vilka sociala medier använder ni?
 - Hur använder ni dem?
 - I vilken utsträckning?
3. Vad är nätmobbing enligt er?
4. Vilka är era erfarenheter angående nätmobbing?
 - Känner ni er utsatta när ni surfar(sociala medier)?
5. Brukar ni använda sociala medier eller internet under skoltid?
 - Vad gör ni då när surfar?
6. Har ni erfarenheter eller vetskap om internet mobbing under skoltid, om ja isfall vilka? – Vad är er generella uppfattning om nätmobbing?
7. Vad för hjälp erbjuder skolan vid nätmobbing? – Är den effektiv?