



CYBERBULLYING
AMONG YOUTH:
WHAT IS IT?
HOW IS IT
EXPERIENCED?
WHAT DO WE
DO ABOUT IT?

**CANDICE BIERNESSER,
PHD, LCSW**



AGENDA



1. What is it?

- Definition and prevalence

2. How is it experienced?

- Mental health impacts
- Experiences of middle school youth

3. What do we do about it?

- Recommendations for parents, school personnel, and mental health clinicians
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WHAT IS IT?

DEFINITION, PREVALENCE, IMPACT



WHAT IS IT?

DEFINITION, PREVALENCE, IMPACT

DEFINING CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is defined as, “**willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices.**”

– Cyberbullying Research Center

Criteria for bullying (Olweus, 1999):

- (1) Deliberate intent to harm
- (2) Imbalance of power
- (3) Repeated over time

Unique elements of cyberbullying:

- (1) 24/7 nature
- (2) Different aspects of anonymity
- (3) Potential for a broader audience

Suggested adaptation: Harm may be experienced in one incident or repeatedly over time across domains related to the most salient aspects of the physical self, including appearance, gender and race.

CYBERBULLYING CAN TAKE ON MANY FORMS

- Harassment
- Bias-based bullying based on race, color, religion, etc.
- Sexting
- Online spreading of misinformation
- Impersonation - posing as a victim through an online profile and sharing negative or inappropriate information)
- Flaming - brief, heated online exchanges)
- Exclusion from online groups or communities

R. Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012.

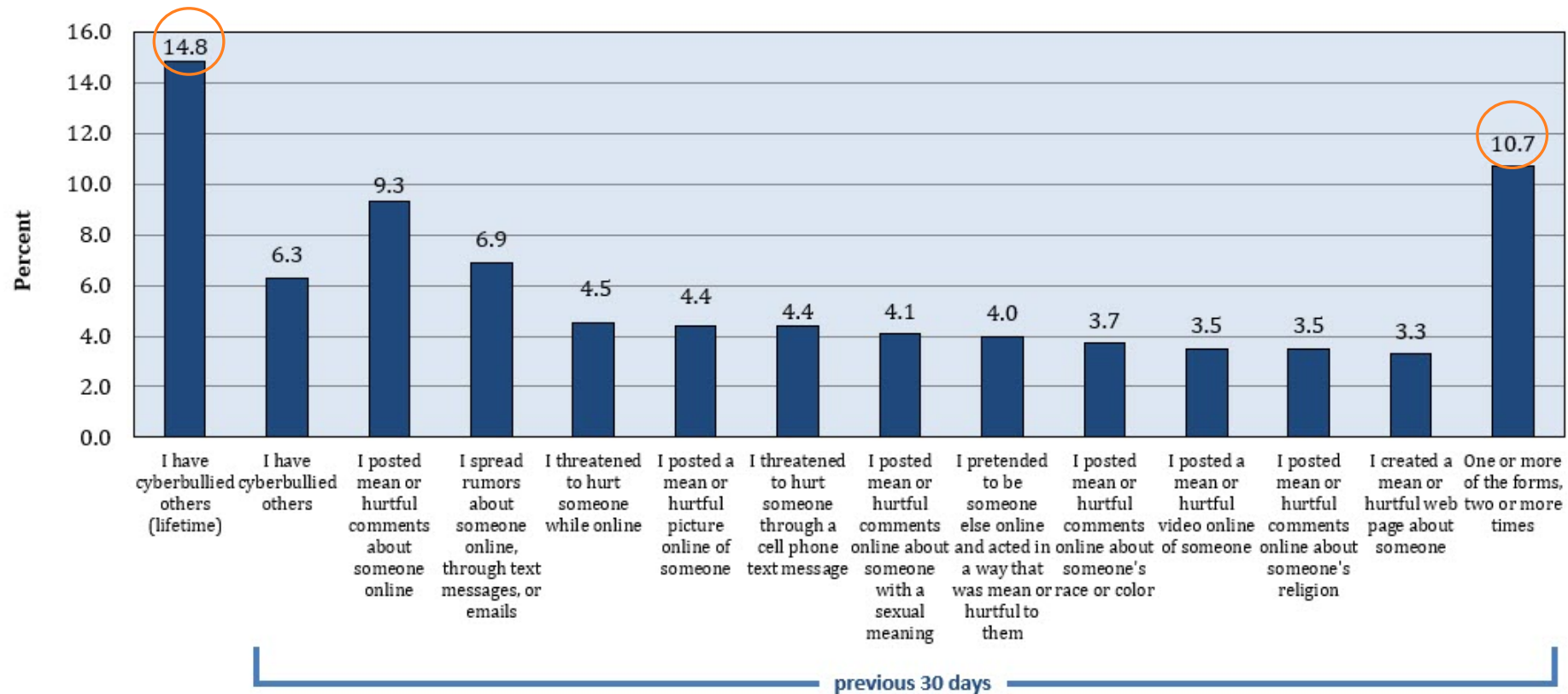
PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING

Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (2019)

Cyberbullying Offending

N=4,972

Nationally-representative sample of 12-17 year old middle and high school students in the U.S.



Cyberbullying Research Center
www.cyberbullying.org

CYBERBULLYING BY AGE AND SEX

- Age: Cyberbullying increases in prevalence after 5th grade, peaks in 8th grade, and remains a problem throughout high school, and college
- Sex: Lifetime victimization is more prevalent among girls (38.7% vs. 34.1% in boys) vs. lifetime perpetration is more prevalent among boys (16.1% vs. 13.4%)

Williams & Guerra, 2007
Hinduja & Patchin, 2019

CYBERBULLYING AMONG SGM YOUTH

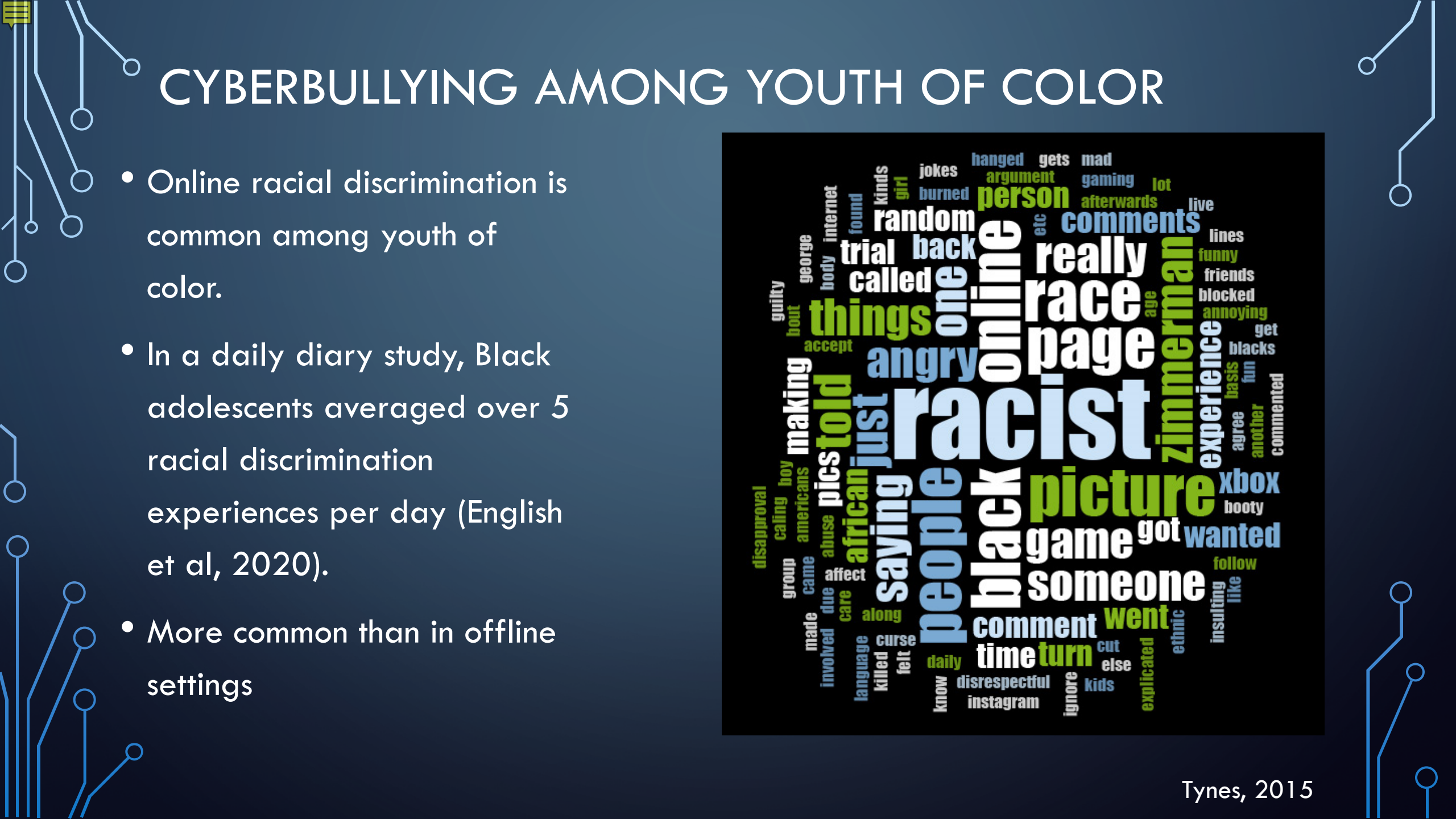
- Sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth experience minority stressors (e.g., victimization, rejection, non-affirmation, and discrimination)
- SGM youth bullying experiences:
 - Gender policing
 - Deadnaming
 - Misgendering
 - Anti-SGM prejudice and discrimination
- SGM youth report cyberbullying at nearly 3 times the rate of non-SGM youth

CYBERBULLYING AMONG YOUTH OF COLOR

- Online racial discrimination is common among youth of color.
- In a daily diary study, Black adolescents averaged over 5 racial discrimination experiences per day (English et al, 2020).
- More common than in offline settings

Tynes, 2015

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CYBERBULLYING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- Babvey et al, 2020- Identified increasing rates of abusive or hateful content and cyberbullying on Twitter, pointed to potential for children to be exposed to increasingly hostile content
- Karmaker & Das, 2020 – collected cyberbullying related public tweets (N = 454,046) posted between Jan 1st – Jun 7th, 2020. Upward trend of cyberbullying-related tweets since mid-March, 2020
- Shanahan et al, 2020 – found pre-COVID emotional distress was the strongest predictor of during-pandemic emotional distress followed by during-pandemic economic & psychosocial stressors, hopelessness, and pre-pandemic social stressors (e.g., **bullying victimization** & stressful life events)

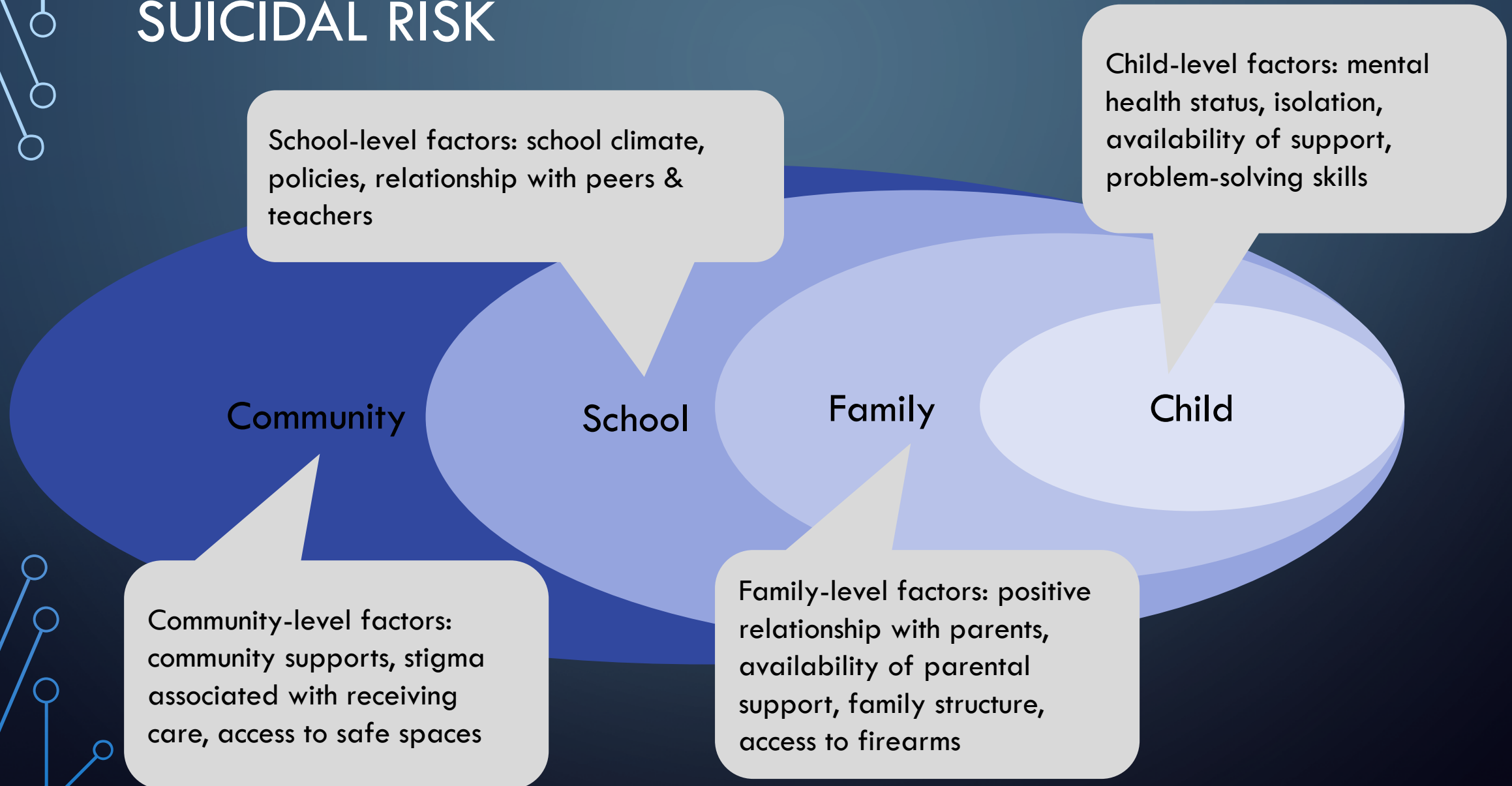
KOWALSKY ET AL, 2014 CRITICAL REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS

- Strongest associations with **cyberbullying victimization** include stress and suicidal ideation.
 - associated with internalizing symptoms of depression & anxiety and both suicidal ideation & behavior
- Strongest associations with **cyberbullying perpetration** include normative beliefs about aggression and moral disengagement.
 - associated with aggressive acts, substance use, delinquency, and suicidal behavior

Reviews of Social Media's Influence on Youth Suicide Risk

	Marchant et al, 2017	Biernesser et al, 2020	Nesi et al, 2021
Risk Factors:			
Heavy/frequent use	X	X	X
Problematic use	X	X	X*
Nighttime-specific use			
Cyberbullying/ peer victimization	X	X	X*
Exposure to self-harm/ suicidal content	X	X	X*
Negative upward social comparison			
Thwarted belongingness/ social isolation			

SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL FACTORS OF BULLYING AND SUICIDAL RISK






HOW IS IT EXPERIENCED?

PERSPECTIVES FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS


FOCUS GROUP STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Conducted a qualitative focus group study of middle school students to inform a cyberbullying prevention intervention (2019-2020)
- Funded by AT&T and Pitt Cyber
- Investigative Team:
 - Rosta Farzan
 - Mary Ohmer
 - Lisa Nelson
 - Ana Radovic
 - Beth Schwanke





FOCUS GROUP STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Sample: 44 students
 - 70% female, 11–14-year-olds (average: 13), private & public schools
 - Recorded, transcribed, & conducted content analysis
 - Data collection focusing on:
 - Defining and contextualizing cyberbullying
 - Experiences with cyberbullying
 - Experiences with school-based prevention programming
 - Intervention needs
- 

RESULTS: DEFINING AND CONTEXTUALIZING CYBERBULLYING

- Students defined cyberbullying as bullying in an online context, sometimes repeated in nature and occurring at different severity levels.

“basically like when they’re bullying over the internet and not directly saying it to your face.”

- They felt bullying that occurred online offered a unique context.
 - Easier to be mean
 - Sometimes anonymous
 - No impact from facial cues/body language
 - Less oversight from parents and teachers

“I think online it’s probably easier to get away with because your parents don’t see it then whereas if you do it in-person someone’s gonna say something.”





RESULTS: DEFINING AND CONTEXTUALIZING CYBERBULLYING



- Participants reflected on the ways in which cyberbullying was particularly a problem for middle school students.

“I think back then [elementary school] it wasn’t really a problem because all our parents were like, because mine was like, ‘You don’t need a phone. You don’t need to go on all that stuff.’ But now it’s just to the point where you’re having bullying at school and it just extends to online, and it just gets worse and worse.”



RESULTS: EXPERIENCES WITH CYBERBULLYING

- Students acknowledged personal experiences with cyberbullying as a victim or perpetrator, as well as witnessing cyberbullying.
 - Victim: degrading physical appearance, diminishing reputation, rejection
 - Perpetrator (fewer reports): offensive jokes/misunderstanding
 - Witness: occurred more frequently
- Severe forms of cyberbullying:

“Religions one’s that probably has the biggest impact.”

“When they’re like racist, it’s probably the worst.”



“Things like spying on people online, hacking into their information, stealing information...”

RESULTS: REACHING OUT FOR HELP

Support Person	Pros	Cons	Examples
Parents	Trusted sources of support & understanding	Feared restrictions to social media use	"I might have a closer relationship with them than my friends...I trust more that it's gonna stay between us."
Peers	Helpful to talk to someone who could relate	Could share their discussion with others without their permission	"I would tell someone I know and trust won't tell anyone else." "...but they could easily tell anybody anything."
School personnel	Trusted sources of help if bullying pertained to school	Concerns toward breaking confidentiality, lack of understanding, disciplinary action, unhelpful response	"If it's a school thing...I'd just tell a teacher I trust & can count on." "The teacher could talk too loud and a student hears & spreads everything."
High school/college-aged friend or relative	Comfort in disclosing to someone who could relate, beneficial source for support	None noted	"I talk to my brother [18 year old] cause he's learned...and it always does help me."



RESULTS: EXPERIENCES WITH PREVENTION PROGRAMMING





RESULTS: INTERVENTION NEEDS

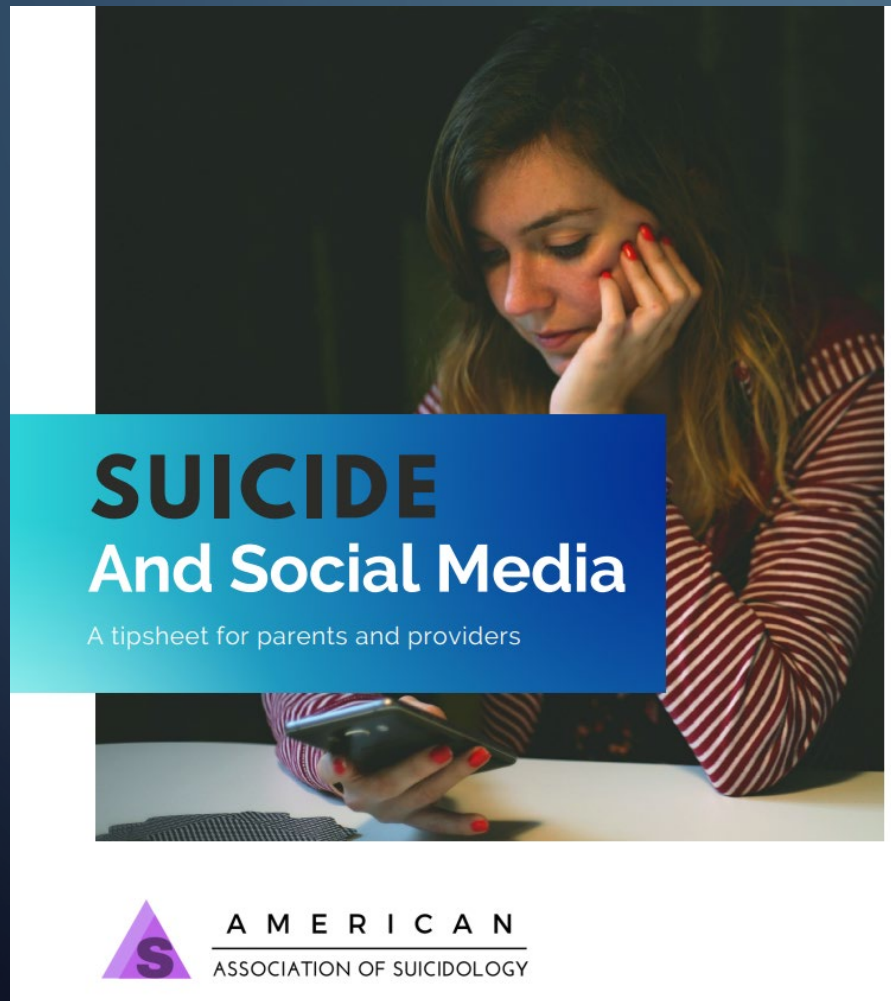




WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS, SCHOOL PERSONNEL, AND
MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

AAS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS (2019)



- Build an awareness of social media trends and uses.
- Monitor access, use, and impacts of social media, particularly through open conversation
- Consider the child's developmental stage and mental health vulnerability
- Mitigate exposure to potentially harmful content.
- Recognize both positive and negative aspects of social media.

<https://cyberbullying.org/resources/parents>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

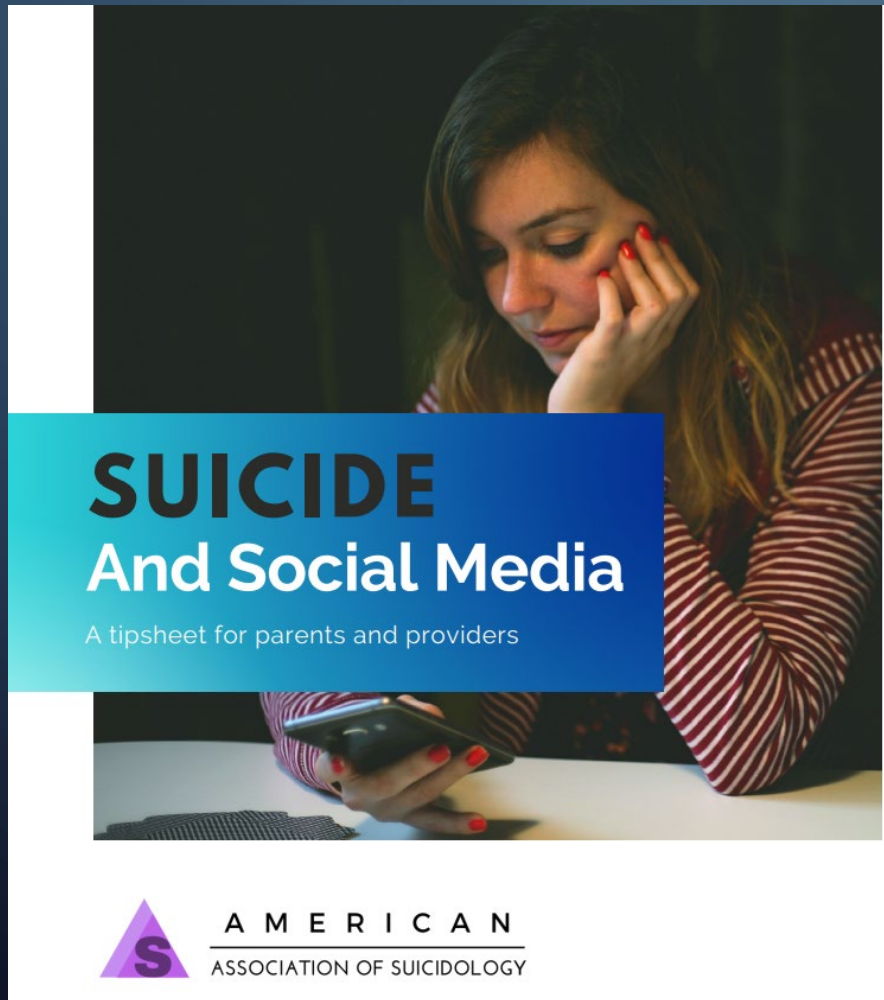
Prevention:

- Monitor through open conversations about experiences on social media.

Intervention:

- If one-time incident and/or minor in nature
 - suggest ignoring, deleting, or blocking the sender
- If repeated and/or severe in nature:
 - Listen supportively and calmly, show empathy, validate, relieve concerns toward consequences
 - Investigate what happened, documenting and saving correspondence
 - Consider contacting the content provider to report what happened
 - Communicate with the school if the incident involved another student
 - Involve law enforcement/seek legal advice when necessary

AAS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS (2019)



- Ask youth about social media & how it impacts their daily life
- Include digital lives/social media use as a component of safety planning
- Recognize positive aspects of social media use that are important to adolescents, in addition to potential negative effects
- Recognize that some children are more vulnerable than others
- Mitigate exposure to harmful/hateful content

<https://cyberbullying.org/resources/educators>

<https://cyberbullying.org/resources/health-care-providers>

RECOMMENDATIONS SCHOOL PERSONNEL

- Thoroughly investigate all reports of cyberbullying
- Work with families of involved students
- Contact the website, game or app where the bullying occurred. Most platforms have procedures in place to deal with issues relating to cyberbullying.
- Involve school resource officer/law enforcement when necessary
- Provide support and resources to the targeted student and parents:
 - Reassure student that the bullying is not their fault
 - Make SAP/mental health referrals when needed

(www.safeschools.info & www.homelandsecurity.pa.gov/Pages/Cyberbullying www.nasponline.org, www.cyberbullying.org)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS: ASSESSMENT

- Add a measure of cyberbullying to your screening/assessment battery – only 11% of youth report cyberbullying to a trusted adult on their own
 - Review of cyberbullying measures:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4703330/#!po=34.3750>
- Consider distressed emotional states that are common following cyberbullying:
 - Down mood
 - Fear
 - Worry
 - Loneliness
 - Hopelessness
 - Self-blame
 - Lack of belongingness
 - Feeling like a burden to others

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS: INTERVENTION

- Intervene to reduce suicidal risk:
 - Support coping with cyberbullying with distress tolerance/emotion regulation techniques
 - Brief problem-solving skills could aid youth in responding to cyberbullying
 - Facilitate connections to trusted adults
 - Address barriers to motivation in help-seeking
- Recognize options for reporting of cyberbullying
 - PA Bullying Prevention Consultation Line: 1-866-716-0424
 - Additional resources:
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/bullying/Pages/default.aspx>
- Liaison with schools & parents

RESOURCES/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

- Prevention through curating a healthy and safe online environment
 - [Cyberbullying Prevention Resources for Students](#)
- Be an upstander
 - Emotionally support the person targeted by cyberbullying
 - Help them to seek help/support when needed
- If targeted by cyberbullying:
 - Take a pause. Consider how you're feeling and how you want to respond.
 - Don't retaliate.
 - Based on the severity and frequency of the bullying, consider ignoring it, seeking support, or reporting it.
 - Reporting resources: [Report through social media](#), [Pitt's Anti-Harassment Policy](#)
 - Support seeking resources: [Pitt Counseling Center](#), [Stomp Out Bullying Resources](#)



RESOURCES

RESOURCES

- Cyberbullying Resource Center: (Resources for teens/youth, parents and educators) www.cyberbullying.org
- StopBullying.gov: (Tips and resources for teens, parents and educators) www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying
- GLSEN: (Resources for teachers and allies to create safe learning environments for LGBTQ students) [Homepage | GLSEN](#)

RESOURCES

- The Trevor Project: (Crisis intervention and suicide prevention resources for LGBTQ young people) www.thetrevorproject.org
- PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center: (Resources and support for parents of children with disabilities, as well as, information regarding bullying and cyberbullying) www.pacer.org/bullying/info/cyberbullying/
- Anti-Defamation League: (Resources, education and support to combat anti-Semitism, bigotry, discrimination and injustice, includes resources for bullying and cyberbullying) www.adl.org
- Safe2SaySomething: (Youth violence prevention program run by PA Attorney General. Support, resources and anonymous tip/reporting line) www.safe2saypa.org
1(844)saf2say/723-2729

RESOURCES

- ACLU: (Bullying and protected class issues): www.aclu.org
- Education Law Center: www.elc-pa.org
- Center for Safe Schools PA: (Bullying prevention resources and education/trainings) www.safeschools.info
- PA Bullying Prevention Consultation Line: (Support and resources for student, parents and school personnel) 1(866)716-0424
- American Association of Suicidology: <https://suicidology.org/>

RESOURCES

- OnGuardOnline: (FTC's free online tips and resources for parents and educators)
www.consumer.ftc.gov
- Bark: (App that monitors text messages, YouTube, emails and 30 social networking apps) www.bark.us
- Common Sense Media's Ultimate Guide to Parental Controls:
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-parental-controls>
- AT&T Secure Family: (App that tracks location, limits screen time and filters web and app use) www.att.com



THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!
LUBBERTCL@UPMC.EDU