'The more public it is, the more severe it is': Teachers' perceptions on the roles of publicity and severity in cyberbullying

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Abstract

Those in the teaching profession are facing additional challenges when responding to cyberbullying due to the unique features of publicity and severity. Such features are known to negatively impact on young people's cyberbullying experiences. Teachers' views on publicity and severity of cyberbullying are currently unknown. The current research draws on data from 10 focus groups with 63 teachers (10 males) who taught across primary, secondary, and college educational levels in the UK. Reflexive thematic analysis identified three themes: (a) role of severity, (b) differential roles of publicity, and (c) bystander intentions. Participants discussed the role of severity, where visual acts of cyberbullying were perceived more severe than written forms, suggesting the type of cyberbullying is an important indicator in perceived severity. Participants acknowledged how cyberbullying can transition from private, semi-public, and public incidents, which influenced their perceived intervention strategies. Finally, levels of publicity were discussed regarding young people's bystander intentions, with public incidents of cyberbullying instigating positive and negative bystander intervention. The findings are discussed in relation to practical implications, especially the need to promote awareness for teachers on the issues of publicity and severity in cyberbullying.

Keywords: Cyberbullying; Severity; Publicity; Bystanders; Teachers; Schools

Introduction

Bullying in the school environment is a challenge that teachers have been expected to address within their role (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011; Von Marées & Petermann, 2012). When it comes to the prevalence of bullying, these reports fluctuate due to inconsistent definitions and assessment methods within the research (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2017), which impacts on young people's self-reported bullying involvement (Przybylski & Bowes, 2017). One recent large-scale survey in the UK of 9,150 12-20-year-olds revealed 51% were bullied at least once a month, with at least 34% being bullied each week (Ditch the Label, 2018). This highlights the extent of bullying with young people, so it is important to consider how teachers address the issue within the school. In England, there are requirements from the Government to address bullying in schools, with a legal responsibility to respond to bullying both within and outside the school environment (Department for Education, 2017). Olweus (1978, 2013) proposed a widely used and accepted definition of bullying, consisting of three distinct criteria. The criteria include: (i) an intention to inflict harm from the bully to the victim, (ii) a perceived or actual power imbalance between the bully and victim, and (iii) the repetitive nature of the incident. As teachers are required to respond to incidents that meet these criteria (Department for Education, 2017; Willard, 2007), it is important to consider their views to provide valuable insight on the management of bullying within the school in the UK.

The introduction of digital technologies and the availability to communicate online have introduced new dynamics in bullying, placing increased pressure and challenges for schools (Green et al., 2017; Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). In particular, the increased accessibility to the internet has meant that young people are spending more time online (Livingstone, Mascheroni, & Staksrud, 2018; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). While this includes educational and recreational benefits (Finkelhor, 2014), young

people can also bully victims through electronic communication, also referred to as 'cyberbullying' (Olweus, 2013; Smith & Livingstone, 2017). Some scholars have defined this contemporary form of bullying using the traditional characteristics of face-to-face bullying, due to the similar overlap (e.g., Juvonen, & Gross, 2008; Olweus, 2013; Quirk & Campbell, 2015; Smith, 2019), drawing on the principles of intent, power imbalance, and repetition. Despite this, other researchers recognise the challenge trying to apply traditional features of traditional bullying to cyberbullying due to a number of unique characteristics in the digital domain (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Macaulay, Steer, & Betts, 2020; Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015). In particular, compared to traditional bullying, cyberbullying can reach a much wider and potentially unrestricted audience (i.e., increased publicity), which can occur at any time, and the bully can choose to remain anonymous (Berger, 2013; Casas, Del Rey, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2013; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Involvement in cyberbullying has been linked with an array of negative outcomes, including reduced self-esteem (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015; Lohbeck & Petermann, 2018; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010), deterioration in attainment and academic grades (Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2014), suicidal thoughts/attempts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, 2019), and an adverse outcome on a school's climate and community (Beale & Hall, 2007; Cohen & Freiberg, 2013). These negative consequences on social and educational outcomes associated with bullying involvement also persist into young adulthood, as reported in longitudinal research (Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Despite prior reviews reporting the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions in combating cyberbullying in the school (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, & Ttofi, 2019), the extent to which teachers view and manage cyberbullying in relation to key features, is yet to be established.

To further understand teachers' perceptions towards cyberbullying, it is important to examine the research that addresses teachers' perceptions towards bullying more generally. For example, teacher characteristics which exhibited reduced control to intervene in bullying were associated with increased victimisation rates in the classroom (Oldenburg et al., 2015), suggesting the responses of teachers can impact on pupil's overall involvement in bullying. Comparing reports from 236 teachers on responses to physical, verbal, and relational bullying from vignettes, it was incidents of physical bullying that elicited disciplinary behaviours and immediate intervention compared to verbal and relational acts of bullying (Yoon, Sulkowski, & Bauman, 2016). This implies there are variations in how teachers respond according to the type of bullying. In addition to this, teachers were also more likely to provide support for the victim of direct bullying compared to indirect bullying, which was true regardless of teaching experience (Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011). Therefore, schools should place more importance on building all teachers' confidence to manage bullying

From a theoretical perspective, social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1986) provides a useful explanation on the influences of thought processes on behavioural actions. For example, one key cognitive component is self-efficacy. This centres on the judgement or belief to succeed in a situation. In the context of bullying, if teachers believe they are capable of intervening and managing a situation they witness, they are more likely to implement their intervention actions. However, the intent and action in the theoretical construct of self-efficacy can also be different. For example, research has shown that by improving self-efficacy, the intention-behaviour gap can be reduced, promoting the belief, and importantly the action to succeed in a situation (Isa, Ueda, Nakamura, Misu, & Ono, 2019). In the context of teachers, research has explored bullying intervention self-efficacy and teachers' interventions. For example, in traditional bullying literature, teachers who report higher levels of bullying intervention self-efficacy were more likely to intervene that those who

reported lower levels (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Duong & Bradshaw, 2013; Fischer & Bilz, 2019). In addition, when exploring teachers with less experience, bullying intervention self-efficacy was the only predictor when responding to bullying (Duong & Bradshaw, 2013). The notion of bullying intervention self-efficacy has also been reported in the context of cyberbullying (Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles, & Simmonds, 2014; Williford & Depaolis, 2016), and so this domain specific self-efficacy is an important factor to consider in regard to anti-cyberbullying strategies. However, as schools are under increasing pressure to manage cyberbullying (Green et al., 2017; Spears et al., 2009), it is important to explore the perspectives of those in the teaching profession regarding the factors that may influence cyberbullying intervention.

A recent international review of teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying identified a limited scope of literature addressing this growing issue, with inconsistent reports on teachers' management towards cyberbullying (Macaulay, Betts, Stiller & Kellezi, 2018). For example, while some teachers feel cyberbullying does not constitute a problem they are responsible for (Li, 2008), some teachers believe they are unprepared (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012) and need to do more to address the issue (Green et al., 2017). Examining teachers' strategies to address cyberbullying, parental inclusion with the school, and highlighting consequences of cyberbullying to pupils were reported as the most helpful in managing cyberbullying (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, & Ferrin, 2012). In a sample of 328 teachers from elementary, middle, and high school educational levels, the majority believed cyberbullying to be a problem in the school environment, with elementary teachers placing greater concern on cyberbullying (Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013). In addition, findings from 2781 teachers from Taiwan across elementary, middle, and high schools, found that 60.7% of teachers believed bystanders of cyberbullying would inform a teacher or adult (Huang, & Chou, 2013). However, qualitative research with 14 secondary school teachers in

the UK suggested that teachers thought young people did not have the confidence in their teachers' ability to manage cyberbullying, hence reducing disclosure of victimisation to those in the educational community (Betts & Spenser, 2015).

This suggests it is important to examine teachers' perceptions towards cyberbullying across different educational levels in order to identify discrepancies and similarities in teachers' views.

Severity

The extent to which an incident of bullying is regarded as more or less severe has been implicated in the literature as a key factor influencing how bullying is perceived, and hence responded to. For example, initial research from a sample of 92 11-16-year-old pupils comparing different types of cyberbullying and the perceived impact on the victim found picture/video types of cyberbullying to be regarded as the most severe (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006). In addition, with a sample of 533 11-16-year-olds, visual acts of cyberbullying (e.g., spreading of pictures/videos) were perceived as more severe than text-based acts (e.g., emails/texts) (Smith et al., 2008). Such views were supported via focus group data, attributing the wider audience and absence of peer-support online as factors that increased the impact for the victim (Smith et al., 2008). Similar findings were also reported by Slonje and Smith (2008), with pupils describing a greater psychological impact due to the 'concreteness effect' from actually seeing the embarrassing photo/video. As young people view these acts of cyberbullying differently according to the level of severity, it is important to consider if teachers perspectives are similar or dissimilar, as such views could have an influence on teachers' capacity to intervene.

In the context of teachers' intervention to bullying, research via semi-structured interviews identified that the severity of the incident predicted teachers' likelihood to intervene. For example, non-physical forms of bullying were deemed less serious compared

to physical incidents (Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). In terms of cyberbullying, even when teachers are aware of cyber related victimisation experiences some may feel as if cyber acts of victimisation are less serious than traditional forms (Boulton et al., 2014; Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011). As scholars argue there is a close overlap between traditional and cyber forms of bullying (Olweus, 2012; 2013; Quirk & Campbell, 2015), particularly between cyberbullying and verbal/relational forms of bullying (Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson, 2009; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009), it is important to understand in more depth teachers perceptions to cyberbullying in terms of severity.

Publicity

Research has suggested that cyberbullying may vary according to the publicity, often distinguished across public (i.e., visible to anyone), semi-public (i.e., visible to those in a group), and private (i.e., visible by the bully and victim only) (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009; Fawzi, 2009; Machmutow, Perren, Sticca, & Alsaker, 2012). Recent findings suggest cyberbullying is more prevalent via public mediums online compared to private communication (Schade, Larwin, & Larwin, 2017). This finding is not trivial considering that more private forms of cyberbullying often go unnoticed or at least fail to be disclosed to teachers. However, the findings may also suggest that bullies have a motive to target victims more publicly for greater humiliation and potential dissemination. Qualitative research with 25 adolescents found that public instances of cyberbullying were perceived to be more humiliating: *'because it was online for everyone to see, it's more embarrassing'* (Dredge, Gleeson, & De la Piedad Garcia, 2014, p289). This suggests the context of publicity could explain discrepancies in young peoples reported negative outcomes from victimisation, so it is crucial to consider how those in the teaching profession regard publicity, especially in relation to their intervention of cyberbullying.

Research addressing the roles of publicity and severity have started to acknowledge the connection and association between these two features. For example, in a sample of 70 adolescents from Italy, Spain, and Germany across 9 focus groups, public incidents were perceived more severe than those where the bully targeted the victim privately (Nocentini et al., 2010). This was attributed to the unlimited audience in public domains, intensifying the negative consequences for the victim. While some research identified no link between publicity and perceived severity (Palladino et al., 2017), the consensus remains that public acts of cyberbullying are more severe due to the wider audience, increased humiliation/embarrassment, and reduced control over the situation (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Menesini, Nocentini, & Calussi, 2011; Nocentini et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2017). This reduced control associated with victims targeted in public domains can lead to increased negative outcomes (Kowalski, Limber, Limber, & Agatston, 2012), including helplessness (Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson, 2009). However, it is possible cyberbullying victims being targeted privately can take greater control through more effective coping strategies (e.g., blocking the bully) (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013).

Research has suggested that teachers perceive the distribution of embarrassing photos or videos as the most prevalent type of cyberbullying within the school (Huang & Chou, 2013), so teachers have an important role in supporting the victims (DeSmet et al., 2015). In a recent study using focus groups with nine pre-service teachers in the UK, public instances of cyberbullying were suggested to be more severe, attributed to the increased impact on the victim (Macaulay, Betts, Stiller, & Kellezi, 2019). However, the research exploring the perceptions of those within the teaching profession in the UK is limited. As such, it is important to explore teachers' perceptions on the roles of publicity and severity, to gain an insight into their views and current preventive measures based on these features.

Bystanders

The roles of severity and publicity in cyberbullying are also known to influence bystander responses, and so exploring teachers' perceptions on this issue would be valuable as teachers have an important role in the successful implementation of bystander intervention in the school (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Despite the debate on the effectiveness of school-based bullying intervention programs centred on working with peers in traditional bullying (Smith, 2016; Smith, Salmivalli, & Cowie, 2012), the role of bystanders that witness traditional bullying and cyberbullying have an important role in the prevention of bullying (Doane, Ehlke, & Kelley, 2019; Menesini, Zambuto, & Palladino, 2018; Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012).

Bystanders who are present and witness cyberbullying are likely to interpret the incident which could influence their perceptions of the victim and bully based on the content they see (Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, & Shulman, 2009). As such, factors such as the publicity and severity of cyberbullying have been found to influence behavioural intentions to support the victim or not. On the one hand, cyber bystanders are more likely to positively intervene through victim support or seeking help from an adult when they witness a severe compared to a mild cyberbullying act (Bastiaensens et al., 2014, 2015; Macaulay, Boulton, & Betts, 2019). In addition, bystanders online were more inclined to support victims of cyberbullying when targeted more publicly (Bastiaensens et al., 2014, 2015). On the other hand, bystanders can also amplify the severity of the incident if they respond negatively by supporting the bully (Barlińska, Szuster, & Winiewski, 2013; Dredge et al., 2014). The finding that bullying severity can influence bystanders' intentions has also been reported in the limited qualitative research in this area (DeSmet et al., 2012; 2014; Forsberg, Thornberg, & Samuelsson, 2014; Thornberg, Landgren, & Wiman, 2018). For example, in a recent qualitative study of 17 students from Sweden, participants discussed that they were more likely to intervene in bullying when they regarded the situation as serious (Thornberg,

Landgren, & Wiman, 2018). Previous qualitative research has found that cyberbullying is often observed by students as non-serious, and so would intervene less (Forsberg, Thornberg, & Samuelsson, 2014). In addition, qualitative research has also found that when students held strong beliefs in their ability to intervene as a defender, bystanders were more likely to intervene in bullying, suggesting that defender self-efficacy has an important role in bullying intervention (Forsberg et al., 2018; Thornberg, Landgren, & Wiman, 2018).

In a recent systematic review on factors that influence bystander intervention in cyberbullying, only 4 out of the 19 articles identified explored this through a qualitative approach (Domínguez-Hernández, Bonell, & Martínez-González, 2018). One such study by Desmet et al. (2014) reported an overlap in how young people respond as a bystander in traditional bullying and cyberbullying, suggesting approaches to promote positive intervention can be implemented for both forms of bullying. Despite this overlap, young people preferred to support victims of cyberbullying in person rather than online (DeSmet et al., 2012; 2014). In addition, research exploring qualitative responses from 961 adolescents found that personal factors such as moral responsibility and empathy engagement with the victim, played an important role in the capacity to positively intervene as a bystander to cyberbullying incidents (Price et al., 2014). While prior research has focused on exploring how young people respond to bullying, the current study considers how those within the teaching profession perceive bystanders to bullying. These views would provide a unique perspective and shed light on whether teachers' views are similar or dissimilar to those of young people.

From a theoretical perspective, bystander intentions can be explained by 'diffusion of responsibility', as proposed in the social psychological research by Latane and Darley (Latane & Darley 1976; see Hogg & Vaughn, 2011). This theoretical notion would argue positive bystander intentions would decrease in the presence of other bystanders. However,

prior research has found how diffusion of responsibly in cyberbullying can also be explained by perceived severity, with young people offering more support for severe types of bullying (Macaulay, Boulton, & Betts, 2019). This suggests that perceived severity of cyberbullying may act to influence how bystanders online respond to cyberbullying. The current study offers a unique contribution to the literature by exploring the views of teachers, who ultimately play an important role in promoting bystander intervention and contributing to the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Gaffney et al., 2019; Polanin et al., 2012).

While cyberbullying is considered to be most prevalent during early-mid adolescence, all young people are vulnerable to cyberbullying involvement, so it is important to explore teachers' perceptions across primary, secondary, and college educational levels in the UK (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Further, the age children are going online is getting younger, with majority of children aged 5-15 years going online for at least 9 hours or as much as 21 hours a week on average (Ofcom, 2017). In addition, guidelines have been provided to primary, secondary, and college institutions which outlines the responsibility of teachers to address cyberbullying (Department for Education, 2017). Together, this suggests a need to examine teachers' perceptions across all educational levels in the UK, as they have the capacity and facilities to target large groups of young people via anti-bullying and e-safety measures.

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions towards cyberbullying, specifically addressing the roles of publicity and severity. This is the first known study to address teachers' perceptions in this area and offers an original contribution to the literature.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from 10 schools in the United Kingdom, across primary (5 focus groups, 31 teachers), secondary (2 focus groups, 11 teachers), and college (3 focus groups, 21 teachers) educational levels. A total of 63 teachers (10 males) participated across the 10 focus groups. Table 1 shows the number of participants for each focus group and the corresponding educational level the teachers were currently teaching. Table 2 outlines the participants' age and teaching experience across the educational levels. While the size of the focus groups varies, this aligns with prior recommendations for larger focus group discussions for a breadth of knowledge (Krueger, 2014), and smaller discussions between three and five participants for additional depth and contribution between participants (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

[Table 1 + 2 near here]

Procedure

A random sample of schools was contacted in the UK, Midlands. The ten schools recruited for the current study are typical state-funded schools in urban areas. The participating schools taught young people from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, as described in all the schools recent Ofsted reports. The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook requires schools to provide information and evidence on safeguarding and anti-bullying measures (Ofsted, 2018). The recent Ofsted reports for the schools reported 'good' to 'excellent' safeguarding and bullying measures described as 'effective' and 'rigorous'. Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to taking part. The focus groups were conducted in 2017-2018. Recruitment aligned with staff development/training days or after the school day to avoid interruptions to teaching requirements. The focus groups explored teachers' perceptions of the roles of publicity and severity in cyberbullying. The focus groups were conducted following a semi-structured interview guide informed by prior

literature (Boulton et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2011; Macaulay, Betts et al., 2018). For example, prompt questions included '*Would you respond differently depending on how severe the cyberbullying act was, and why would you respond that way?*' and '*What circumstances would you be more likely to intervene in an act of cyberbullying?*'. All focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and lasted approximately one hour (average 50 minutes 52 seconds).

Data analysis

An inductive reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to understand and explore the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). As cyberbullying is addressed and managed through group decisions in the school environment, focus groups provided a more accurate reflection of discussions made in the school environment.

The reflexive thematic analytical approach allowed a clearer understanding of meaning and group perspectives on cyberbullying, rather than individual experiences and characteristics (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019, Krueger, 2014). The reflexive thematic analysis conducted offers a robust systematic interpretation of the data to identify a pattern of shared meaning across all the focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Braun et al., 2019). It is important to note the number of instances each theme was present in each focus group is not presented, as advocated by the Braun and Clarke approach to reflexive thematic analysis. In this approach, themes are not dependant on quantifiable measures, but rather themes represent meaning across the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2014; Braun et al., 2019). In addition, including quantifiable elements in relation to the themes that emerged from the data can cause several problems when interpreting the research. For example, in line with the approach taken by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019), additional research suggest quantifying the prevalence of themes can lead to inaccuracy in the approach to reflexive thematic analysis, which can impact on the overall

conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis due to misinterpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hannah & Lautsch, 2011; Maxwell, 2010,; Neale, Miller, & West, 2014; Sandelowski, 2001).

Each focus group was transcribed verbatim shortly after being conducted. The transcripts were read and re-read for initial familiarisation of the content. After familiarisation, the content was reviewed and coded according to the research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006), addressing teachers' perceptions towards publicity and severity in cyberbullying. This process was repeated several times for each transcript to ensure all features and views of participants had been coded appropriately and fully explored. The codes were reviewed and collated for each transcript to generate initial categories. These were then reviewed and collated across the whole data set for the development of initial themes and sub-themes. The themes were assessed and refined to reflect the participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019).

Results

Three themes were identified from the reflexive thematic analysis: (a) role of severity, (b) differential roles of publicity, and (c) bystander intentions. Table 3 provides a representation of the themes and associated sub-themes.

[Table 3 near here]

(a) Role of severity

Role of severity comprised of two sub-themes: perceptions of severity and protocols in management. Participants discussed a typology of severity according to the type of cyberbullying perpetrated. The discussion extended to principles of repetition and how this changes the dynamics of perceived severity, while recognising the challenges of interpreting severity. The participants then discussed protocols in managing cyberbullying according to

the severity of the incident. The importance to respond to all instances of cyberbullying was essential, although how the incident was managed would differ dependant on the severity of the bullying.

Perceptions of severity

Teachers across all educational levels discussed a typology of severity in relation to the type of cyberbullying being perpetrated, with text-messages being portrayed as less severe:

> *Well a mild one would be two children maybe in school, and one had just been sending texts to the other, I would say that's mild (P2, focus group 6)*

In contrast, all the participants perceived visual acts of cyberbullying (e.g., photos) to be more severe due to the wider audience:

> *A severe one would be an inappropriate picture of a child going around, and a lot of people seeing that, that rings massive alarm bells (P1, focus group 1)*

Primary, secondary, and college teachers perceived that if the act involved a wider audience this would increase the level of severity, with inappropriate photos being more severe. These perspectives from teachers were also identified in focus group data from 11-16-year-old children (Smith et al., 2008). Despite these views from teachers and young people, research has supported the notion that the context of cyberbullying is more important than the objective severity of a situation (Englander, 2019). In line with this view, compared to

secondary and college teachers, most primary teachers recognised differential levels of severity within photos depending on the context:

> *Or pictures, there can be degrees of severity in pictures, like a picture that just wasn't very flattering or wasn't very nice or an actual picture that was very inappropriate. So, there is like you say, there is definitely a range, a severity range (P8, focus group 3)*

This suggests that while acts of cyberbullying involving photos may be more severe, it is the content and material of what is being sent that is more important when judging the severity of such incidents (Englander, 2019). While prior research suggests the anonymity and wider audience associated with cyberbullying is linked with perceived severity (Smith et al., 2006; 2008), the views of primary teachers suggest contextual information regarding cyberbullying is a better indicator on the severity of the incident rather than the type of cyberbullying. In addition, the characteristic of repetition was recognised as an important component of the perceived severity of cyberbullying incidents from most primary and secondary teachers:

> *I think if it's relentless as well. If it's happened over and over again, then that would be treated more seriously than if somebody had said one comment, it's still bad, but if its, more relentless then its more severe (P7, focus group 4)*

Therefore, the repetition of cyberbullying is perceived to be more severe from primary and secondary teachers compared to single acts of online perpetration. However, although cyberbullying is partly defined using the repetitive characteristic from traditional bullying, this is more ambiguous online. For example, a single act of aggressive behaviour online can

be viewed and/or shared multiple times by others (Smith, 2015; 2019). As such, teachers with a responsibility to manage cyberbullying should be informed to recognise different variations of repetition in the context of cyberbullying. While primary and secondary school teachers discussed how the repetition of cyberbullying can influence bullying severity, college teachers perceived that *'every case is severe potentially' (P5, focus group 9)*, where the notion of severity should be defined through the victims' perspective:

> *Yeah, because you have to define the term severity, because that individual who is being bullied, erm that could be really severe by just saying one or two words to somebody who's had pictures and other things done so yeah (P6, focus group 8)*

This suggests that teachers should regard all incidents as severe and judge appropriate responses according to the perceived severity determined by the victim. For example, while most teachers regard text-based cyberbullying to be less severe than photo incidents, primary teachers suggested it could be the former that is more severe for the victim:

> *Actually, the name-calling could be the straw that breaks the camel's back, so actually there is no level of severity (P2, focus group 5)*

Protocols in management

Although some primary, secondary, and college teachers recognised that all incidents of cyberbullying can be severe, their management of the incident would also depend on the severity of the situation. For example, the teachers across all educational levels reported that their response would be different according to the severity of the situation:

> *Depending on the severity of it, if it's something serious, we would report to the safeguarding team or the senior leaders would deal with it, erm, or if it is something small, it might be a case of talking to the two children or the parents, but again we would still go through the safeguarding team (P1, focus group 1)*

This suggests the perceived severity of cyberbullying could have an impact on the teachers' likelihood to intervene and the type of intervention implemented. Prior research has reported that teacher intervention in bullying can be predicted by the perceived severity of the situation (VanZoeren & Weisz, 2018). In addition, secondary and college teachers tailored their intervention according to the type of cyberbullying:

> *If its photographs, its straight away a police matter, if its photographs that's out there, we send straight away for police. If it's erm, if it's text-messaging, erm, then we deal with that differently, we tend to deal with that less if we can (P7, focus group 7)*

Further, secondary and college teachers are aware of their legal responsibility and the regulations they must follow according to the severity of the incident. These teachers discussed the need to involve external agencies (e.g., the police) for more severe instances of cyberbullying, in their role to have a duty of care as outlined under the Protection of Children Act Section 1 (1978). Differences in reported management strategies according to the type of cyberbullying was also suggested by primary school teachers:

> *There's a difference, text-messaging, in which we would meet and do a cyberbullying session and have a chat. But then that's different to a photo being sent over which is*

sexually explicit and actually needs a criminal investigation as well (P6, focus group

5)

The teachers across all educational levels suggested the notion that while all cases of cyberbullying may be severe, distributed photos would need an immediate response through external involvement. In comparison, the teachers suggested that written forms of cyberbullying, discussed as less severe by most of the teachers, would be addressed through school discussions and formative educational sessions on cyberbullying. Despite some college teachers perceiving the repetition of cyberbullying not to be important in the perceived severity of the situation, other college teachers suggested they would intervene differently:

From a teaching point of view, if I found out somebody had just been bullying

somebody online and there is only a couple of posts, really horrible but only a couple

or one, you might have a very long chat [...] but then if you have that chat and go

away and do it again [...] well, you know, it's now disciplinary (P3, focus group 9)

These views from primary, secondary, and college teachers suggest that the repetition of cyberbullying could influence how these acts are responded to and managed.

(b) Differential roles of publicity

The differential roles of publicity theme comprised three sub-themes: typology of publicity, responding to publicity, and victim vulnerability. In this theme, the teachers defined categories of publicity and how their response and management would vary

according to the level of publicity. The teachers further discussed the perceived impact on victims and victims' vulnerability according to the publicity of cyberbullying.

Typology of publicity

Primary, secondary, and college teachers discussed and suggested a conceptualisation of levels of publicity across private, semi-public, and public incidents:

P4: *Could private be literally sending direct like hurtful messages or abusive messages to one person, so you're just receiving texts (focus group 7)*

P3: *Then semi-private, if there was a group of people in that chat, then public, for me it would be (focus group 7)*

P1: *Posting it online for everybody to see, yeah (focus group 7)*

All the teachers perceived private acts of cyberbullying as occurring between two people through the medium of text-messages. Teachers recognised semi-public acts as extending to a group of people beyond the initial dyad, whereas public incidents involved a wider audience of people being able to witness the act. Primary teachers discussed the differences between semi-public and public according to the audience involved:

[Public] has the potential to literally go viral and to go global, but a WhatsApp message between six friends, its semi-public. But, but more containable. Somebody would have to step outside of that and share it elsewhere, to become more public (P5, focus group 2)

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In the focus groups, primary teachers suggested that semi-public incidents of cyberbullying are more 'containable' due to the fixed number of members within a group conversation. In addition, in online groups, young people *'choose the people you put in the group, whereas public anybody can see' (P6, focus group 3).* Despite these views from primary teachers, most secondary and college teachers recognised the challenges defining such terms, suggesting private acts of cyberbullying could easily transition across the levels of publicity:

> *Private will very quickly become public, through experience, that's what we get, its private and its nasty so they'll pass it on and they'll say you saw what they did or seen what they said, it doesn't stay private long, if it's something that's, that's nasty, it gets out there (P6, focus group 7)*

Consequently, the secondary and college teachers in this sample perceive the notion of publicity in cyberbullying to be very ambiguous due to the instant transition from private, semi-public, to public. In addition, when cyberbullying is public, all teachers across educational levels recognised the lack of control over the potential distribution and dissemination of the cyberbullying incident:

> *Share it, and the rate it is shared at is one of the biggest issues, how quickly and how fast it's shared (P5, focus group 5)*

Responding to publicity

In the focus groups, primary, secondary, and college teachers discussed their management and response as teachers when addressing incidents of cyberbullying across

different levels of publicity. While secondary and college teachers suggested all instances of cyberbullying would be addressed straight away regardless of publicity, some primary teachers discussed how their response would be different. For example, some primary teachers suggested they would implement an immediate response for public incidents of cyberbullying:

> P3: *I think if it was a public act of cyberbullying, like, we would have to deal with it more on a class or year group or school basis, so, there would have to be a bigger response (focus group 4)*

> P1: *Because I think that it affected more people in a way, so it does seem a bit more pressing I guess (focus group 4)*

Although some primary teachers respond immediately to public acts of cyberbullying due to the wider audience and potential impact for the victim, other primary teachers suggested cyberbullying perpetrated privately is just as important to address:

> *Yeah, I was just thinking like it might be a bit more, deep-seated if it's just between the two people and you might need to unpick it a bit more than something as obvious as like a group and everybody's just joined in, jumped on the bandwagon (P2, focus group 4)*

While secondary and college teachers believed all incidents of cyberbullying should be addressed in the same manner, regardless of publicity, primary teachers discussed the challenges and difficulties when responding to public incidents in particular:

> *You wouldn't be able to reign it in as quickly. I think if it was like a WhatsApp message we could get it, if it was six children involved, we could deal with six children, we could speak to them about it, but if it's gone, like further than that you can't pull it back in (P1, focus group 2)*

This suggests primary teachers perceive public acts of cyberbullying as more difficult to address, due to the potential scale of dissemination. In the context of publicity, primary, secondary, and college teachers would intervene immediately and report to the safeguarding officer. Specifically, most primary teachers believed their response would not be influenced *'by the reaction of the victim' (P7, focus group 3)*. Instead, primary, secondary, and college teachers perceived perpetrators should receive equal disciplinary measures regardless of publicity. However, primary teachers suggested the level of support for the victim should be tailored appropriately according to the impact on the victim:

> *We change the things that we do for the victim. Depending on how people have been involved. So, if the victim is, is particularly badly upset by it, it could be that, we might refer, them to our erm, emotional literacy support or teaching assistant who would then talk to them [...] there are, other avenues that we can explore for the victim, but for the perpetrators, the consequences would be the same (P1, focus group 3)*

Victim vulnerability

In the focus groups, all the teachers discussed how the notion of publicity may impact the victim according to the negative consequences from victimisation. Initially, reflecting on

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private incidents of cyberbullying, some college teachers discussed the isolation associated with private victimisation:

> *If its private you are sort of dealing with it on your own so to speak, it's just you and that anonymous person (P1, focus group 8)*

The anonymous nature associated with cyberbullying could imply *perceived* or *actual* power for the perpetrator where they can target the victim in a private setting. However, primary and secondary teachers argued that more public acts of cyberbullying would *'feel really demoralising' (P1, focus group 4)* for the victim due to the wider audience leading to increased negative feelings. Some of the college teachers also shared these views:

> *If someone had made negative comments that were public so other people could see it, I think that would be quite an embarrassing situation to be in and I think it could create a lot more feelings if it's public than if it was private. If someone had done something negative or hurtful to me privately […] I'm the only person that can see that, whereas if it was made public there are so many more eyes looking at that (P4, focus group 10)*

Most primary, secondary, and college teachers perceived the wider audience associated with more public acts of cyberbullying could trigger wider negative consequences for the victim. On the other hand, as suggested by some secondary school teachers, the wider audience in public domains could mean perpetrators target victims in private domains for more prolonged victimisation with *'drip, drip, drip, a feed of negativity' (P1, focus group 6)*. In addition, as

discussed by secondary and college teachers, perpetrators may target victims privately if they have the motive to conceal their perpetration from the public domain:

Don't you think the person who's putting it on there would realise there would be witnesses and save the really bad stuff for private because they know there are witnesses to what they said and put (P2, focus group 10)

However, most primary, secondary, and college teachers still suggested the wider audience associated with public incidents could increase the impact for the victim, *'the more public it is, the more severe it is, in terms of consequences for the victim' (P5, focus group 2)*. In addition to this, primary, secondary, and college teachers perceived the impact for the victim would be greater when more people in the school environment were aware:

If you went to school the next day, you'd know that one person sent you a text-message and you'd be like oh just that person knows. But if you knew it had been on Facebook and shared hundreds of times, you'd come in and think, oh everyone knows about this, what they going to say, you'd be a bit different I think (P5, focus group 7)

These views from teachers in the UK across different educational levels suggest that the publicity of cyberbullying is an important factor to explore regarding perceived severity of bullying.

(c) Bystander intentions

Primary, secondary, and college teachers also discussed the role of bystanders, particularly in relation to perceived publicity of cyberbullying. Most of the teachers

suggested that perpetrators target victims publicly due to the potential increased audience to encourage others to be negative: *'Posting something online and encouraging people to be derogatory' (P7, focus group 5).* On the other hand, most secondary and college teachers suggested the possibility for positive bystander behaviour when victims are targeted publicly:

> *But then also when its public because, you've got other people who may be sticking up for you, and saying you shouldn't say that […] and be more positive towards the victim (P6, focus group 8)*

This suggests that most secondary and college teachers perceived that when victims are targeted publicly, bystanders can choose to respond in a positive manner by helping the victim. However, some secondary school teachers noted that an absence of such bystander behaviour could amplify the negative outcomes for the victim: *'well it's like a feeling of isolation, being isolated, nobody wants to help you' (P2, focus group 7).* Some of the secondary teachers discussed this may be explained due to fear of retaliation or becoming the victim themselves:

> *Some people that wouldn't necessarily instigate it will go along with it and spread it rather than, they would rather be on that side of it rather than the other side of it happening it to them (P4, focus group 7)*

This notion raised by secondary school teachers has also been reported in qualitative research with young people as a factor for not intervening (Thomas et al., 2012). While most teachers recognised the propensity for negative or positive bystander intentions when victims are

targeted in the public domain, primary teachers suggested the challenge to support victims targeted privately:

> *Although, if its private it's just between them, those two individuals, then nobody else knows about it. If its public, yes, you've got lots of negative from other people but there's also the option to have support from other people as well. Whereas if it's just you and them, nobody else might know about it, nobody's there to help you (P3, focus group 5)*

This suggests a degree of difficulty by primary school teachers supporting such victims. In the context of disclosure intentions, most teachers across primary, secondary, and college educational levels suggested that when more people are involved as bystanders, teachers perceived some bystanders would disclose the victimisation:

> *If there are more people in the group chat, there's more likely that one of them will stand up and say this is happening [...] sometimes it's not the person that's being bullied that blows the whistle, its usually somebody else (P6, focus group 10)*

Most teachers discussed the importance of bystanders in the online domain, particularly in respect to disclosure of bullying.

Discussion

Three themes were identified across the ten focus groups from the reflexive thematic analysis: (a) role of severity, (b) differential roles of publicity, and (c) bystander intentions.

Theme 1: role of severity

In the *role of severity* theme, primary, secondary, and college teachers discussed a typology of severity in relation to cyberbullying. Teachers across all educational levels suggested that text-based incidents of cyberbullying were less severe compared to photo/visual acts of cyberbullying. These views from teachers support prior research specifying how the type of cyberbullying can explain differences in perceived severity (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Menesini et al., 2011; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). In particular, the views of these teachers reflect those that have previously been reported in qualitative work with young people (Smith et al., 2008). Despite these perspectives, it may be that teachers and young people are more prone to witness these acts of cyberbullying as they have been reported to be more prevalent in the online domain (Schade et al., 2017). Although all teachers suggested that a wider audience to cyberbullying may increase the perceived severity of the situation, primary teachers recognised there can be varying levels of severity when acknowledge contextual information. For example, primary teachers perceived sharing sexually explicit photos, also known as 'sexting' (Lenhart, 2009), to be more severe compared to an embarrassing photo being distributed online. In line with research recommendations on managing cyberbullying, the views of primary teachers suggest the *content*, rather than the *type* of cyberbullying may be more important when teachers judge the severity of bullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Englander, 2019).

In the context of bullying severity, primary and secondary teachers suggested the notion of repetition targeting a victim online numerous times was regarded as more severe than single incidents. While some research may suggest the repetition of bullying has an impact on the perceived severity of the situation (Palladino et al., 2017; Slonje et al., 2017), in cyberbullying, repetition is more ambiguous as a single act can be shared numerous times (Thomas et al., 2015; Smith, 2015, 2019). Contrary to primary and secondary teachers' views, college teachers regarded the idea of bullying severity to be a vague term but rather

suggested every situation of cyberbullying could potentially be severe, and so teachers should review the incident through a victim's perspective. These views offer some an important insight into how to manage cyberbullying. For example, young people can react differently to cyberbullying according to their resilience and personal or contextual factors (Domínguez-Hernández, Bonell, & Martínez-González, 2018; Erişti & Akbulut, 2018), so teachers should further consider the perspectives of those victimised when responding to the issue.

In the *role of severity* theme, all the teachers discussed the management of cyberbullying in relation to perceived severity. Across primary, secondary, and college teachers, all the teachers discussed the use of tailored strategies according to the severity of the situation. For example, teachers discussed how they would adopt discussion-based strategies for those involved in less severe cases of cyberbullying (e.g., suggested by all teachers to be text-based comments), compared to external involvement and safeguarding procedures for more severe cases of cyberbullying (e.g., suggested by all teachers to be embarrassing or explicit photos). This could suggest that perceived severity of cyberbullying may explain discrepancies in teachers reported management strategies (Macaulay, Betts et al., 2018). However, teachers and young people sometimes regard cyberbullying instances as less serious than traditional bullying (Boulton et al., 2014; Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011; Sticca & Perren, 2013), so the views teachers in the current study offer a unique insight on how teachers perceive, and respond to cyberbullying. The teachers across the focus groups appraised the use of discussion-based strategies between the victim and bully, which has been reported to be effective in the literature (Baraldsnes, 2015; DeSmet et al., 2015). In addition, as perpetrators of cyberbullying are often unaware of the severity of their actions (Campbell, Slee, Spears, Butler, & Kift, 2013; Perren, Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Malti, & Hymel, 2012; Slonje et al., 2013), teachers can educate young people on the consequences of cyberbullying, and the impact it can subsequently have on the victim.

Theme 2: differential roles of publicity

In the *differential roles of publicity* theme, primary, secondary, and college teachers discussed the typology of publicity in cyberbullying and suggested a conceptualisation according to three levels. These views from teachers also reflect those reported by pre-service teachers in the UK (Macaulay, Betts et al., 2019). In addition, prior research has also reported the notion of three levels of publicity within cyberbullying: private, semi-public, and public (Dooley et al., 2009; Fawzi, 2009; Machmutow et al., 2012). For this typology, all teachers suggested private acts of cyberbullying occurred only between a victim and perpetrator, semi-public acts included a set number of individuals in an online group, and public incidents of cyberbullying were accessible for anyone to witness beyond the victim and bully. These views from teachers across the educational system in the UK support findings reported in quantitative work in this area (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Schade et al., 2017), and reflect qualitative views from young people and teachers (Smith et al., 2008; Macaulay, Betts et al., 2019). In the focus groups, primary teachers discussed key differences between semi-public forms of cyberbullying, and public instances. For example, primary teachers perceived semi-public acts of cyberbullying were more containable as they could respond and discuss the situation with everyone in the group. However, secondary and college teachers addressed the difficulty categorising publicity, as anything private could become public due to the possibility that material can be shared outside the initial dyad (Dooley et al., 2009; Kowalski et al., 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013). As young people regard cyberbullying to be more serious than traditional bullying, especially in the domains of public rather than private incidents (Sticca & Perren, 2013), additional training and guidance should be provided to schools to ensure all teachers are aware on different levels of publicity.

In terms of how teachers suggested they would respond to cyberbullying according to the level of publicity, primary teachers believed they would respond differently, while

secondary and college teachers would respond in the same manner. Primary teachers suggested that the wider audience involved in public acts of cyberbullying, means an immediate school-level response is needed to contain the incident spreading further. In support of such actions, anti-bullying interventions focussing on a communication and positive school culture are reported to be effective (Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014; Thompson & Smith, 2011). However, secondary and college teachers and some primary teachers also raised the difficult responding to public incidents of cyberbullying. In the context of cyberbullying, perpetrated regardless of publicity level, all teachers suggested a need to tailor the support provided to the victim to help overcome their victimisation experiences.

Additionally, in the *differential roles of publicity* theme, the teachers discussed the notion of victim vulnerability. On the one hand, college teachers perceived in private settings the victim is going to be more isolated, with the bully targeting their victim over a longer period. On the other hand, primary and secondary teachers perceived public incidents of cyberbullying could be more severe to the victim due to the wider audience. Some college teachers also shared these views. These views from teachers support prior qualitative research that public instances of cyberbullying are more severe for the victim due to greater feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, and reduced control (Dredge et al., 2014; Macaulay, Betts et al., 2019), and support trends reported in quantitative work (Kowalski et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Sticca & Perren, 2013; Wright et al., 2017). It is consistent with the view that bullies target victims publicly for greater humiliation (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Schade et al., 2017). When cyberbullying is in a public domain, the exposure to the targeted victim is escalated as the size of the audience that can witness their victimisation increases, potentially causing repeated exposure as bystanders further disseminate the incident (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009).

Theme 3: bystander intentions

In the *bystander intention* theme, the element of publicity was discussed in relation to those that witness an incident of cyberbullying online. Secondary and college teachers perceived incidents of cyberbullying in the public domain would elicit positive support by helping the victim. This is consistent with prior research on positive bystander support in public and severe instances of cyberbullying (Barlińska et al., 2013; Bastiaensens et al., 2014, 2015; DeSmet et al., 2012, 2014; Patterson, Allan, & Cross, 2017; Macaulay, Boulton, & Betts, 2019). Most of the teachers in the current study perceived public instances of cyberbullying to be more severe. In the context of young people, qualitative work has found that young people are more likely to respond positively as a bystander as bullying severity increases (Forsberg, Thornberg, & Samuelsson, 2014; Thornberg, Landgren, & Wiman, 2018), and in public domains (DeSmet et al., 2012; 2014; Thomas et al., 2012). The absence of positive bystanders was recognised by the secondary teachers as a potential factor increasing the negative impact for the victim. One such reason suggested by secondary school teachers for the lack of bystander support was attributed to the fear of retaliation where young people fear of becoming the victim themselves. This notion has also been reported in qualitative research with young people as a contributing factor for choosing not to intervene in a positive manner (Thomas et al., 2012).

As noted in the Introduction, bystanders are known to 'diffuse' responsibility to positively intervene in the presence of other bystanders (Latané & Darley 1976; see Hogg & Vaughn, 2011). Considering the theoretical framework proposed by Latané and Darley (1968; 1976), the more people that witness an emergency and do nothing, the less likely other people would intervene, via diffusion of responsibility. In traditional bullying, the *physical* presence of other bystanders is more clearly portrayed as young people can visibly see if other people in the school playground intervene or not. On the other hand, in cyberbullying,

the notion of diffusion of responsibility is more ambiguous due to the absence of physical presence (Machackova, Dedkova, & Mezulanikova, 2015). In the context of cyberbullying, it is the perceived or potential number of *virtual* onlookers that can lead to diffusion of responsibility. In addition, in the online environment it is more difficult for bystanders to accurately evaluative the incident and determine if the victim needs help or not (Domínguez-Hernández, Bonell, & Martínez-González, 2018; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014). The current findings from teachers' views suggest that the perceived severity of cyberbullying may be a better indicator of whether young people respond as a bystander, than simply the number of onlookers. In the *bystander intention* theme, primary teachers also discussed the difficulty supporting victims of cyberbullying targeted privately and suggested the importance of promoting disclosure to help these young people. In line with this opinion, there is a growing call for the educational community to promote disclosure intentions with young people (Baas, De Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Betts & Spenser, 2015; Englander, 2019).

Practical Implications

These views from primary, secondary, and college teachers offer some important practical implications both within and outside the school environment.

In the context of the *role of severity* theme, the views of teachers suggest those in the educational community responsible for addressing cyberbullying should take a more cautious approach when interpreting cyberbullying. For example, as young people react differently to cyberbullying (Erişti & Akbulut, 2018), and as suggested by most teachers in the current study, the experience and perspective of those victims should be acknowledged when managing cyberbullying. In addition, the views from teachers in the current study suggest a need for schools to ensure all teachers respond to cyberbullying immediately, through appropriate reporting mechanisms. Teachers should also review the contextual information when managing different types of cyberbullying behaviours. Considering the views of

teachers in relation to the *differential roles of publicity* theme schools should provide resources and education for young people to encourage disclosure of victimisation. Implementing a variety of disclosure and reporting systems could encourage young people to disclose their victimisation, even when targeted privately. The views from teachers in respect to the *bystander intentions* theme suggest a need for strategies to mobilise bystander support in the online environment. An important element to promote positive bystander actions is the expectation of appraisal and social support. Therefore, the educational community, parents, and social media companies need to implement social support and recognition for bystander intervention, as this will increase perceived self-efficacy to intervene to support the victim and confront the perpetrator (DeSmet et al., 2014; Price et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2012). For example, if primary, secondary, and college teachers recognise and appraise positive bystander intervention, this will make young people more motivated to act in this manner when the witness cyberbullying online. In addition, parents can have conversations with their children to promote personal responsibility for what young people see online, and effective options they can implement to intervene as a bystander.

Limitations

Some limitations of the study need to be noted. Firstly, the self-selecting nature of participation may cause bias in the discussions. On the one hand, this may mean teachers who are more interested and aware of cyberbullying are probable to volunteer, and more likely to address cyberbullying within the school. On the other hand, it is also possible for teachers who do not hold such knowledge to volunteer on the basis to acquire more understanding during the discussion. As the current study did not measure personal experience or knowledge of cyberbullying, it is possible such experience could have influenced the opinions of teachers. As such, future research would benefit from exploring how personal experience managing cyberbullying may impact on how primary, secondary, and college

teachers respond to different types of cyberbullying. In addition, the current study had an imbalance of participants across primary, secondary, and college educational levels. For example, there was a lower number of teachers from secondary schools, where cyberbullying is known to be most prevalent (Kowalski et al., 2012; 2014; Smith et al., 2008; 2015), so future qualitative work would merit further exploring the views of these teachers.

Despite some of these limitations, the current study provided a unique insight on the voices of those in the teaching profession across different educational levels in the UK. These views are important to explore as teachers have a key role in addressing cyberbullying across every phase of education (Myers & Cowie, 2019).

Summary

In summary, the findings demonstrate the complexities of cyberbullying regarding the roles of publicity and severity and how such factors can impact on the management of those in the teaching profession. Teachers perceived visual acts of cyberbullying as more severe, although the content of the act was more important in determining perceived severity. In addition, teachers tailored their response strategies across levels of publicity, using discussion-based solutions for private incidents compared to whole school strategies (e.g., assemblies) for cyberbullying incidents of wider publicity. Such responses were attributed to the wider impact for the victim associated with public acts. However, the teachers discussed how positive bystander intentions are more probable within public domains. The findings have important implications. They suggest schools need to encourage all young people to disclose cyberbullying involvement, irrespective of publicity, and to ensure those responsible to address the issues are competent and confident to provide appropriate solutions to help those involved. Those in the teaching profession are largely responsible for the successful implementation of intervention and prevention strategies.

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Table 1: Information on the focus groups recruited.

Focus group	Educational level	Participants (males)
1	Primary	5 (0)
2	Primary	7 (1)
3	Primary	9 (0)
4	Primary	3 (1)
5	Primary	7 (0)
6	Secondary	3 (1)
7	Secondary	8 (2)
8	College	8 (0)
9	College	8 (2)
10	College	5 (3)

Table 2: Participants' age and teaching experience across educational levels.

Age (*A*) / Experience (*E*) (years)	Educational teaching level		
A	Primary	Secondary	College
Under 25	7	1	1
25-30	7	4	1
31-40	6	2	4
41-50	8	3	7
51-60	3	1	7
Over 60	0	0	1
E	Primary	Secondary	College
Less than 1	6	1	10
1-2	3	0	4
3-5	8	4	15
6-10	4	3	12
11-15	2	2	7
16-20	3	0	5
More than 20	5	1	10

Table 3: Summary of the themes and associated sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-themes	Example
Role of severity	Perceptions of severity	*Well, an argument online would be a mild incident of cyberbullying. Whereas a severe incident would be when the bully loses control of what they are saying and the number of people who have seen it (P7, focus group 3)*
	Protocols in management	*Taking action straight away, finding out if someone's being bullied and having a conversation with that person. It's our responsibility in education to speak to that person, whether it be a teacher, whether it be a coach, whether it be a support worker. (P6, focus group 8)*
Differential roles of publicity	Typology of publicity	*[Cyberbullying] can be done individually from one person to another, or from a group to a single person or from a single person to a few people. I mean it's also the size of the audience that witnessed the incident (P3, focus group 8)*
	Responding to publicity	*The level of support we put for the victim as well because I was thinking if it was a public thing we might involve [support worker] to put support in for the victim. Whereas if it was a private incident between two people, we probably wouldn't need that level of support. (P1, focus group 2)*
	Victim vulnerability	*However, with peer pressure, you have to be involved in some of these group chats. And if you try and leave the group chat or you try and block the person that's abusing you, everyone can still see what's going on and then, of course, your social life suffers because you're not getting involved which could lead to depression, anxiety and that sort of thing. (P5, focus group 8)*
Bystander intentions		*I think in most cases some situations get out of hand a little bit. I don't think anybody sets out or a lot of them don't set out intentionally to cause*

harm, but it's just fueled by other people joining in. So many people join in and you can see it just escalating up and up and up and up. If you get them right at the bottom you can calm it quite quickly, but when its escalated to much, it's very difficult because there can be loads and loads and loads of people involved. (P8, focus group 8)