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**Cyberbullying: An Australian Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT**

Cyberbullying is becoming an increasingly rampant social problem around the world as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is rising, particularly among young children. Unfortunately the ICT's very nature of being always-on, accessible-from-anywhere, and often anonymous means of communication makes it difficult to regulate what children say or do to each other. Bullies can send threatening or hurtful messages directly to the victim through emails, chat rooms, on social networking sites or on mobile phones. Research has shown that just like schoolyard bullying, most victims of cyberbullying are likely to experience low self-esteem, depression, stress and other related mental-health problems. There are also well-known cases of cyberbullying that has ended in extreme consequences – suicide. The growing number of incidents of cyberbullying has left education authorities, teachers, parents, government bodies and legal institutions in a conundrum. Little is understood of what needs to be done to tackle this new and treacherous form of bullying.

This paper attempts to examine cyberbullying within the Australian context. It is based on the preliminary findings of focus group interviews with Year 11 and 12 students from three high schools in Melbourne, Australia. Essentially, it discusses the various legal issues associated with online bullying including schools' liability to cyberbullying; federal and state laws which may be applicable to such forms of harassment; consequences of an anonymous bullying act; and whether intermediaries can be held responsible for cyberbullying.