

# School bullying has escalated into "cyberbullying"

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THOMSON: We are about to show you video of a brutal attack on a teenaged girl near a high school in Saskatoon, portions of which we aired a little earlier.

A warning, though, before we run the video. The images are violent and they are disturbing. They were recorded by somebody who was there watching the attack take place, possibly recording it on a cellphone.

The girl being attacked is just 14 years old. Her attackers, teenagers themselves. These images have surfaced on the Internet. Police are investigating this. We are going to run portions of that video right now.

[Video of violent beating of girl]

THOMSON: This particular video was sent out to about 5,000 different e-mail addresses. Experts call it "cyberbullying", when kids pick on kids using the Internet and using e-mail.

For more, Stu Auty joins us in studio. He's the president of the **Canadian Safe School Network**. But first, we are going to Saskatoon where Constable Dave Malanovich is standing by. He's a school resource officer with the Saskatoon Police Service.

Good morning to both of you. And thank you for coming on to speak about this.

Constable Malanovich, I know you're not leading this particular investigation, but you have investigated similar situations before. How prevalent is this?

MALANOVICH: It's not very prevalent at all. It's in fact rather rare in our school systems. We like to think that we can intervene before these things develop into an actual incident. And so, that's what we encourage our kids to do, is to gather trust with the adults in the school, the administrators, the counsellors, and also with the school resource officers in the school that are there to help prevent these things before they occur.

THOMSON: And given that you have looked into similar situations before -- rare though they may be -- have you been able to track down the identities of the people involved?

MALANOVICH: Yes. While I can't comment on this particular incident, because of constraints under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, in other incidents it's rather easy, because of the number of people present, to find witnesses and to find out what happened and also gain the confidence of the victims and proceed forward from there.

THOMSON: So, what about the role of technology in all of this? I mean using your e-mail, using the Web, using a cellphone.

MALANOVICH: Yes, technology from when you and I grew up, you know, it's wonderful technology but it can also be used in very inappropriate manners. And I think it's important for the parents of our children to monitor what kind of use this kind technology is being put to use and going on in the evenings on the chat rooms and what kind of use the children have during the day in class and out of class, and how they're using this technology.

THOMSON: And, Constable, what are you telling the students that you speak to about this?

MALANOVICH: Well, a lot of the students we speak to have never had a confrontation with the person that they're fighting with. These incidents are blown up by third parties, and when we finally get to sit down with the two parties that were involved in an incident it was he said/she said and down the road. And they get their information from other people.

So, it's important to try and stop these fights before they're happening. And particularly if you're being pushed into a fight and you have no qualms with this person, talk to an adult or a parent and make them understand that you don't want to fight. And fighting is very dangerous. We've seen serious injuries occur, and we hate to see this because they're very preventable.

THOMSON: Well, and it's heartbreaking.

Let me bring in the president of the Safe School Network now, Stu Auty.

Thank you again for coming in. You just saw that video for the first time. What was your reaction?

AUTY: Well, it's not unusual to see kids, a crowd of kids, witnessing a fight. And it's a power thing. It's all about power. In this case it was a group exercising power over this other girl. It's a form of bullying.

And so, on the one hand, you've got the Roman Colosseum concept where a fight is about to start or a fight happens, a crowd gathers, they watch it, it creates momentum, it creates interest. If there's a weapon involved - - fortunately, in this case there was no weapon, but that girl is being kicked. So that can be a deadly situation where you kick somebody in the head, obviously.

THOMSON: Yeah, but then to turn around and use that video online, using that video to bully yet more.

AUTY: Well, that's the next stage, isn't it? This was the old stage. What we saw there has been going on now for some time now, that kind of concept. But now it's taken to another level. And the other level of course is on the Internet.

And so, now the Colosseum expands exponentially. We've got kids now, thousands of people, witnessing this singular act. And so, it's another situation because of technology. Kids understand technology today much more so than adults do, and it's their world.

THOMSON: And the responsibility is really on everyone of us. I mean not just the school community but the parents. What would you say to parents about this new wave of horrible violence?

AUTY: Well, you know, it's a parent's responsibility to get to know their child's world. If they see differences in behaviours, if they see their child, for example, not wanting to go to school, if they experience their child having a change in friends, being withdrawn, these are warning signs that they need to take a look at. If they're the parent of a bully, they have just as much at risk as a parent of the victim. And what we know today is that quite often now victims can become victimizers if it's not checked early and checked often.

THOMSON: Well, what would you tell parents -- or even students, for that matter -- because cellphones, as you know, are so prevalent. They're going off in student assemblies now. Kids are taking them into school, they're text-messaging, they're doing all of this. I mean, cellphones inherently are not bad, but obviously would be something that you think the parents should say, "Hey, you're not taking a cellphone to school." Or is that defeating the purpose of maybe the safety mechanism there?

AUTY: Very difficult to control. Obviously, we've got an awareness campaign required here. There is very little privacy. Children need to know that. They need to know that once they get on the Web, once they move out into the big world, the protections are gone. And also, they're traceable. Kids now are not anonymous when they go onto the Web. And when they use their cellphone, it's very much traceable. And I don't think a lot of them know that, understand that.

And, as far as the police are concerned, what they're going to do with this, this is evidence obviously.

THOMSON: Sure.

AUTY: And it cannot be controlled in that sense. Children cannot control what happens when they go live.

THOMSON: Okay. Stu Auty, thank you very much for joining us. And our thanks again to Constable Malanovich who's in Saskatoon. Thank you.

MALANOVICH: Thank you.

THOMSON: More to come on this story, I'm sure. Thank you for coming in.