

Cyber bullying on the rise

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CYBER BULLYING is on the increase. And psychologists and online experts warn that while the phenomenon is under-reported, more and more cases will be seen as access to technology increases.

Just under 50 percent of 1 726 youngsters in four provinces questioned in a study said they had been victims of cyber aggression.

One in three youngsters had been victims of cyber aggression at school, while 42 percent had experienced cyber aggression outside school.

The study was carried out by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention in 2009.

A quarter of the youngsters in the survey said they had experienced bullying by SMS.

And one in five admitted to having bullied someone by SMS.

Close to 70 percent of those who had bullied others by SMS had themselves been bullied.

In order of frequency, voice calls, text messages, instant messages, e-mails, videos and photographs were the most common mediums used.

The spotlight fell on cyber bullying on January 30 when a 15-year-old Krugersdorp High schoolgirl was attacked with a glass bottle by a fellow pupil after a series of online attacks by the girl and her friends.

The attack, on the school fields during the morning break, was captured on video and the attacker was later suspended. But this week the attacker returned to school.

Yesterday, a sister of the attacker contacted Independent Newspapers saying the attack was not unprovoked – her sister had been bullied for a year by a group, including the victim.

The schoolgirl is facing a charge of assault and will be in court on Tuesday.

Dr Pieter Streicher, MD of Bulksms.com, said cyber bullying had become a much bigger problem in the past five years. It was growing because technology was growing – and although not everyone in South Africa had a computer, most people had cellphones.

The more widely children were exposed to technology, the more cyber bullying would grow, Streicher said.

“Every individual is a potential publisher. The child can record a video at school and put it on YouTube.”

While cyber bullying in South Africa followed international trends, said Streicher, in terms of intervention, the country was far behind.

“There is a need for all parents to skill up on technology.”

Clinical psychologist Vanessa Hemp said: “Children and teens don’t think about their actions and that what goes on line stays online. It goes viral and can be potent and quite lethal.”