



# Combating online harassment in social and health services

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# **Combating online harassment in social and health services**

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The objective of this thesis is to dive into the topic and world of online harassment for the purpose to educate and find methods to combat it. The thesis is in portfolio format and the topic is viewed and processed through different perspectives and mediums. My goal is to integrate my findings to the social and health care fields and come up with methods to utilize my research in the working life.

The theoretical framework consists of terms and methods faced in online harassment, namely targeted harassment, stalking, defamation, doxing, impersonation and gaslighting. The terms are explained in detail, looked up in The Criminal Code of Finland and examples are given of the methods being used. The theoretical framework includes a summarized history of online harassment: when and how it began, what were the key events that birthed the laws concerning cyberbullying as well as what the statistics have been like in the past 20 years.

Introducing services that are currently offered to victims of online harassment: Sekasin-chat, Sua varten Somessa -project, Ylitse MentorApp and Someturva. Looking into a past online harassment campaign (#Gamergate) and how it was handled and resolved by collective action to help the victims ignore the incoming attacks. Also delving into nonviolent communication to look for ways to combat online harassment.

My research on the topic has been both local and global. While online harassment does live, as the name states, *online*, the people suffering from it as well as the people committing these acts do not. Online harassment is an issue all around the world, and distance can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand a death threat from an anonymous person in France can make the receiver in Japan fear for their life but on the other hand the law enforcement won't take the threat in question seriously unless there is substantial proof the person is going to follow through on it.

Keywords: online harassment, cyber bullying, stalking, defamation, doxing, impersonating, trolling, online threats, social and health services

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## 1 Introduction

This thesis will be a study of online harassment, its history, current situation, and future. I will attempt to find out why cyberbullying became so common. The key focus will be on combating online harassment in social and healthcare services, as well as gather a list of ways to cope for survivors and victims of online harassment.

Online harassment and cyberbullying have skyrocketed during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to a report published in April 2020 by L1ght, an AI-based startup which detects and filters toxic online content to protect children, there was a 70% increase in hate between kids and teens during online chats. (L1ght, 2020).

Multiple studies such as Pew Research Center's State of Online Harassment (2021) have shown that women experience more online harassment and hate speech than men do. Atte Oksanen (2017), a professor of social psychology, says in the book "Vihan ja inhon Internet" (Nieminen, Vehkoo, 2017) that men report online harassment less often than women.

The common theme that repeats when researching what is being done or has been done to stop online harassment seems to be not a lot. The victims are often told to ignore the harassment, to block and report the people targeting them and to turn off their devices and go get some fresh air. The reality is, you can't fully block out online harassment in this day and age, when technology is so tightly integrated into our every day lives. If someone is persistent on tormenting you online, they will find ways to do so even behind the walls you put up around you. The authorities don't get involved unless the severity of the threats reaches danger zones, and most people won't take online harassment seriously until it happens to them or someone they know personally. Online harassment is very real, as are the consequences people suffer from it and something needs to be done about it.

### 1.1 Portfolio form

I chose online harassment as the theme of my thesis as the amount of online harassment has drastically increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (since 2020) and it has affected the wellbeing of many people, both those who have been targeted as well as the people conducting the harassment online. The thesis is in portfolio form to make the contents and findings more accessible to the public as well as have the freedom to view the topics through different medias and points of view. Some of the contents in the portfolio I was already aware of and had learned throughout my studies and some of them I found along the way during my research phase of

the thesis. The findings have been put together in a well-sectioned and organized manner to create a consistent and complete portfolio of the chosen theme.

The aim and objective of the portfolio thesis is to introduce the reader to the terms of online harassment, the methods the cyberbullies use to torment their victims and how and why they get away with it. I research what the law says about these online actions and what, if anything, can be done about them. The product is the portfolio containing all that information in an easy to read and navigate format.

My thesis and the information I have gathered in it can be used by anyone who wants to do further research on the topic and themes within it. It is especially important for professionals in the social and health care field to familiarize and educate themselves about online harassment. They need to be able to help victims that come to them looking for help about the cyberbullying, online harassment, sexual pressure, and the kind of toxic manipulation they face almost daily online in their lives.

## 1.2 Key concepts

The key concepts of this thesis are terms commonly faced in the world of online harassment. The knowledge base and theoretical framework is presented in chapter two in full. The presented methods of cyberbullying chosen for this thesis are targeted harassment, stalking, defamation, doxing, impersonation, trolling and gaslighting.

The thesis includes a short history of online harassment and the passing of laws relating to it in the 2000's. The birth of cyberbullying was in the early 1990's when personal computers became widely available. The second spike of online harassment happened with the release of smartphones in the mid-2000's.

Misogyny plays a big part in online harassment as research shows women are more likely to be targeted online than men. The type of attacks also differs based on gender, women face more sexual harassment online than men and the insults tend to focus on personal things and appearances for women.

Current services being offered regarding online harassment work to prevent it from happening but also focus on supporting the victims being targeted. As with traditional bullying, erasing it from the world is close to impossible, but doing what we can is always better than doing nothing at all.

## 2 Knowledge base of the selected theme

This section goes through some of the key terms and phenomena of online harassment and things related to it. Cyberbullies and online trolls use many methods and tactics to intimidate and attack their targets, and every year they seem to get more creative with reaching that goal of spreading misinformation and abuse. There are several terms and methods that can be discovered in the world of online harassment. The ones chosen for this thesis are what most people will face when targeted online.

As social media and networking sites continue to grow in the future, so will online harassment. With the popularity and growth of the vast world online, there will naturally be an increase in online harassment as people use these services as tools of cyberbullying (Moore, 2011). There will be an even larger increase for online harassment the deeper and longer the Covid-19 pandemic goes on and thus the need for support for the victims increases as well. There is also a huge demand for qualified and informative education on the topic, which should be covered in schools. Much like with traditional bullying, prevention for online harassment also begins from home and there needs to be a way to relay information on cyberbullying to the parents as well as the students.

The role that schools and educators play in preventing online harassment matters. Most if not all schools have policies on harassment and bullying, but how many have included cyberbullying in those policies? If cyberbullying is covered in the school policies, schools will have a legal authority to intervene in online harassment, even if it originates outside of school grounds (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021).

### 2.1 Online harassment

Defining online harassment is not a simple thing: throughout the years of its existence, it has taken many forms and faces and will surely find new ones to morph into in the future. Online harassment has created its own world, from which it is difficult to escape if you get sucked in as the bullies sink their verbal teeth and claws into you and refuse to let go. In this world of online harassment, a new language has developed and terms you've never even heard of, which are everyday life to the victims suffering from this phenomenon.

PEN America has defined the terms online harassment and online abuse as "pervasive or severe targeting of an individual or group online through harmful behavior" (PEN America). Some examples of online harassment: Unsolicited contact online, repeated, and unwanted text messages that contain inappropriate information and place burden on the recipient, inappropriate posts online about a person that are published on social media or an Internet website (Moore, 2011).

When online harassment crosses a line, it becomes a crime. In those cases, it's up to the law enforcement to respond to cyberbullying. It's imperative that the authorities have the required skills and knowledge about the world of online harassment as well as the laws concerning them, to be able to protect victims of online harassment from further harm and ideally prevent the harassment all-together. Even in cases where the harassment doesn't constitute the level of a crime, the police should actively be involved in informing the parties involved about what is appropriate to avoid future misbehavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021).

#### 2.1.1 Targeted harassment

One of the causes or goals of online harassment is attempting to silence people and prevent them from sharing their stories or opinions. In these cases of systematic harassment, the term used is targeted harassment. Discrediting and smearing the target by harassing, threatening, denigrating, and doxing puts the victim in a bad light in the public eye. In these cases, the court of public opinion is often the most damning nail in the coffin of victims.

Individual cases of targeted harassment, such as hate mail, denigration, public shaming online, are often small and do not meet the elements of a crime. Therefore, the phenomenon of targeted and systematic harassment should be judged, instead of breaking it down (Rikosuhrapäivystys).

Finland's Ministry of the Interior put together a task force in 2015, which published their report on how to efficiently improve actions against targeted harassment (Sisäministeriö 2021). The task force also had trouble defining and recognizing where the line of a crime is to be drawn.

"Targeted harassment is often very diverse and not easy to recognize, especially if the focus is on a single case. An individual act may be minor and may not meet the characteristics of any offense or be individually criminally insignificant. However, cases can constitute a serious criminal offense" (Sisäministeriö, 2021).

#### 2.1.2 Stalking

Stalking, meaning repeated threatening, following, surveilling, contacting or otherwise in an equivalent manner unlawfully stalking another, has been a punishable offence in Finland since 2014 (The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889, chapter 25, 7 a §). The legal definition of stalking is as follows: the act or crime of willfully and repeatedly following or harassing another person in circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to fear injury or death especially because of express or implied threats (Merriam-Webster).

In cases where there are actual threats to the victim, the offence can escalate to menace. This means that the victim has cause to be afraid for their safety or property due to the threats against them (Poliisi).

When it comes to online harassment, the term used is cyberstalking: repeated electronic communications (e-mails, instant or direct messages or any other form of online contact) which harass the recipient or cause them fear or distress (Moore, 2011). There are multiple sources that dive into the topic on whether cyberstalking is a modified form of stalking or a separate criminal phenomenon. A study by Matt R. Nobles published in 2012 states that there are notable differences between victims of stalking and cyberstalking (Nobles, 2012).

According to a study conducted by Dr L. P. Sheridan in 2007, almost half (47.5%) of 1051 self-defined stalking victims reported harassment online, but only 7.2% was judged to have been cyberstalked. The study concluded that cyberstalking doesn't fundamentally differ from traditional, proximal stalking (Sheridan, 2007).

### 2.1.3 Defamation

Defamation and aggravated defamation are the legal terms for spreading false information or insinuations of another person and causing damage or suffering to that person in doing so (The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889, chapter 24, 9 § & 10 §). Despite it being a criminal offense, most defamation cases are shut down in the preliminary investigation in 2013, 64% of defamation cases in Finland did not make it past the preliminary investigation. The most common reason for this is the severity, or lack thereof, of the act. Only about 10% of the defamation cases in Finland in 2013 ended up being prosecuted and the charges were dropped after prosecution in 14% of those cases (Yle, 2014).

Defamation is one of the most common forms of online harassment, and mostly shrugged off and ignored by law enforcement and other authorities. In most cases, unless the victim is in actual danger, the preliminary investigations followed from the victim's police reports are terminated quickly (Nieminen, Vehkoo, 2017). In 2020, there were over 5000 registered defamation cases in Finland (Tilastokeskus, 2021).

### 2.1.4 Doxing

Doxing or doxxing comes from "dropping docs", documents, and means the publishing of a person's sensitive information online without the victim's consent (Avast). The published details may include full legal names, residential addresses, social security numbers, business records, personal photos, etc. The act of doxing includes not only releasing the information but publishing it in an easily accessible form: the gathered and released details may already be

publicly available but gathering and releasing them with the intention to expose or harass the target makes it into doxing. This has become the weaponized go-to strategy for online bullies and trolls to attack anyone and everyone online (Douglas, 2016).

One of the reasons why doxing has become a popular method for trolls and bullies is that it's not even illegal in most cases. They can hide behind the terms "public information" and "obtained with legal methods". In some cases, doxing can be judged as stalking, harassment or menace and tied to the laws regarding those acts. The severity of doxing also depends on the released information (Kaspersky).

#### 2.1.5 Impersonating

Harassment by impersonation isn't as common in everyday trolling and harassment as the other methods listed here, but it does still happen. Essentially this means that someone has created a fake profile online pretending to be someone else, and often happens to politicians, celebrities, and various influencers in the current online spotlight, as opposed to "regular" people. If the account was created with the intent to cause distress to the person or defame the target, it can become a criminal offence (Cohen Davis Solicitors).

So called parody accounts are often the exception. In March 2019 California Republican Rep. Devin Nunes sued Twitter for \$250,000,000.00 over two parody accounts "Devin Nunes' Mom" (@DevinNunesMom), and "Devin Nunes' cow" (@DevinCow) created which according to Nunes defamed and insulted him. The judge ruled that Twitter is immune to the claims of defamation and negligence because the company is protected by law (Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act). The Twitter account pretending to be Nunes' mother was suspended after his real mother complained about it to Twitter. The Twitter account @DevinCow is still active today (Stracqualursi, 2019).

In Finland impersonating a public official is a crime, but this law doesn't seem to cover basic citizens (The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889, chapter 16, 9 §). The law closest to protecting regular people from impersonation would be identity theft, which prohibits deceiving a third party unlawfully by using personal information, access codes or other corresponding identifying information of another (The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889, chapter 38, 9 a §).

#### 2.1.6 Trolling

Probably the most known form of online harassment is trolling, and the definitions and connotations of the term varies widely. Some perceive the act of trolling as a generally humorous activity whereas online trolls are thought of as negative creepers (Fichman, Sanfilippo, 2016).

Recognizing trolls is an important skill when interacting with people on the Internet. Trolls use different methods to deliberately deceive and trigger others to provoke a reaction out of them (Golf-Papez, 2016). The key difference between trolling and flaming (the act of posting insults online) is that trolling is instigated with the intention to provoke, whereas flaming is a reaction to provocation (Hardaker, 2013).

The most effective countermeasure for trolls is to ignore them. “Don’t feed the troll” is a common expression in these cases, because trolls thrive off attention and engagement and are being “fed” by it. Thus, starving the trolls by ignoring them is the most efficient way of “killing them” (Bergstrom, 2011).

### 2.1.7 Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a type of psychological abuse where the goal is to make the victim question themselves and seem or feel “crazy” (Sweet, 2019).

In *The Gaslight Effect (2007)* Dr. Robin Stern described the relationship between the abuser and the victim. The abuser’s goal is to confuse the victim and exploit the weaknesses they find while the victim begins to doubt their very concept of reality in the cycle of abuse. This is the very core of gaslighting, and the victim submits to it, because they end up believing the abuser, even yearning for their approval (Stern, 2007).

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis wrote a book about gaslighting (*Gaslighting, 2018*) and pointed out the term gaslighting does not have a definition in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. In 2020 Annie Wright, a Relational Trauma Recovery Specialist, mentioned the same thing regarding DSM in her blog entry about gaslighting. Gaslighting shares characteristics with Cluster B Personality Disorders: Histrionic Personality Disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder & Borderline Personality Disorder (Sarkis, 2018).

Gaslighting in extreme situations can be judged as coercive control and may be illegal in such cases. Intimidating, coercing, or forcing a person to do or not do something is a reprehensible act in Finland (The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889, chapter 25, 8 §).

## 2.2 History of online harassment

Online harassment and cyberbullying began in the 1990s as the possibility to acquire a personal computer became widely available. Traditional bullying made its way to Internet chat rooms and took the form of a new type of monster, which learned with the rise of technology that they can harass their victims from the safety of anonymity online (Data Overhauleders).

There were no specific cyberbullying laws until the mid-2000s (FindLaw). After the Colorado school shooting on April 20, 1999, in which 13 people were killed and 20 wounded, states in America began passing anti-bullying legislation. Some of these laws included cyberbullying as an offense (Study.com). With the release of smartphones, cyberbullying quickly got out of control in the mid-2000's (Bark).

Cyberbullying drove multiple teens to suicide, which caught the attention of the mainstream media. One of the earliest documented cases of suicide due to online harassment was 13-year-old Megan Meier, who took her own life on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Her mother, Tina Meier, founded The Megan Meier Foundation in 2007 which is still actively working to prevent bullying and cyberbullying to this day (Megan Meier Foundation).

18-year-old Jesse Logan told her story of harassment after she had sent nude pictures of herself to her boyfriend, who forwarded them to other high school girls after the couple broke up. In July 2008 Jesse Logan hanged herself in her bedroom, after months of torment and torture from her classmates. Cynthia Logan, the grieving mother, continued to tell Jesse's story to warn people about the dangers of sending intimate photos to boyfriends and girlfriends (TODAY, 2009).

In nearly identical circumstances a year later, 13-year-old Hope Sitwell ended her life after her boyfriend shared her nude photos to six high schools in Florida. The bullying continued even after her suicide in 2009, as the multiple harassment pages on MySpace and Facebook kept getting hate and harassment comments about Hope. Donna Witsell created a group called Hope's Warriors after the loss of her daughter, to help combat bullying and save other parents from going through the loss that she did (Kaye, 2010).

There are countless of stories such as these. Tyler Clementi jumped off a bridge to his death in 2010 (Tyler Clementi Foundation). A federal cyberbullying law, the Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act, was named after him in 2012. Amanda Todd posted a video on YouTube in 2012 called "My story: Struggling, bullying, suicide, self-harm", and killed herself a month after (Amanda Todd Legacy). A week later, Canada began drafting national anti-bullying legislation.

Cyberbullying Research Center has been collecting data on online harassment since 2002. According to their Lifetime Cyberbullying Victimization Rates, which includes eleven different studies from 2007 to 2019, an average of 27,8% of students has suffered from cyberbullying. From the same studies, a chart with Lifetime Cyberbullying Offending Rates was drawn in which an average of 15,7% of students has taken part in online harassment (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2019).

### 2.3 Misogyny in online harassment

Misogyny, the hatred of or prejudice against women, walks hand in hand with online harassment, especially when the abusers are male. The attacks, threats and hate mail written to women by men often include degrading and demeaning insults which imply the writer sees no value in the receiver based on their gender and often is even heavily biased against them because of it (Merriam-Webster).

Men and women experience different type of harassment online. Pew Research Center conducted a survey (2014) on online harassment faced by men and women at the ages of 18-24. While both genders faced harassment and abuse online, women were stalked and sexually harassed more than men. Young women experience particularly severe forms of online harassment, whether it's being called offensive names, purposeful embarrassment, stalking, sexual harassment, physical threats, or sustained harassment (Pew Research Center).

Anita Sarkeesian wrote a "Guide to Internetting While Female" published in Marie Claire magazine (Sarkeesian, 2015) and brings light to how women are often victims of sexism, degrading insults, gaslighting and general misogyny just for "Internetting while female". Victims of online abuse are told to ignore it, toughen up and grow a thicker skin, instead of focusing on the wrongdoings of the abuser. Turn the other cheek, be the bigger person, it's just the Internet, but it isn't. It's real abuse and no one should have to endure it (Sarkeesian, 2015).

In the book "Vihan ja inhon Internet" (Nieminen, Vehkoo, 2017), the author Johanna Vehkoo explains why the stories in her book focus on women. She says hate speech is often talked about but very rarely connected to the women hate in societies.

When women online get targeted, it often focuses on their person and identity, despite the reason why they are targeted. From the multiple stories of women presented in Vehkoo's "Vihan ja inhon Internet" the only common factor was that the victims were female, or female assumed, and had an opinion. The trolls and abusers who came to flood these victims with hate mail and threats sometimes didn't even know or remember why they are attacking the person (Nieminen, Vehkoo, 2017).

In her book about the online harassment directed at women, "Hate Crimes in Cyberspace" (2014), Danielle Citron says cyber harassment should receive similar treatment as sexual harassment and domestic violence did when the feminist movement made a stance and gave them names. These actions were then stigmatized as wrong, and laws were passed to make them criminal offences. Up until that point, sexual harassment was just something women needed to accept, and domestic abuse happened behind closed doors (Citron, 2014).

### 3 Combating online harassment

Online harassment has been around for 30+ years, and society has found no effective ways to get rid of it permanently. Law enforcement sometimes find it difficult to define online harassment to people as some feel that a bothersome message constitutes harassment when in fact the messages must be repeated and cause the recipient discomfort or harm to be consider online harassment (Moore, 2011). Social media and other sites online have options to report harmful and abusive content, but there are frankly too many trolls and bullies to deal with them all.

Online harassment against women in the video game communities escalated in 2014. Female gamers, game developers and reviewers were targeted on social media and within games. The phenomenon went viral and was named #Gamergate. While there was no actual solution to the harassment and attacks spewed by the anonymous trolls, collective action became a tool for combating it. Instead of feeding or fighting the hate, those targeted via the #Gamergate movement used blockbots (blocklists developed by volunteers) to stop receiving any notifications or messages from the cyberbullies (Barnes, 2018).

Throughout the years there have been different kinds of movements, companies, and platforms to combat online harassment and to support the people who are being targeted by cyberbullies.

#### 3.1 Sua varten Somessa

One of these movements is the Sua varten Somessa-project (translates to for you in social media). The project was created in 2020 by Loisto settlement, Puijola settlement and Nicehearts ry and its goal is to reduce the sexual harassment, cyberbullying, and violence young people (aged 8-21) face in social media. Young people who are being harassed or who simply suspect something weird is happening can message the project on any of their social media accounts for support and advice at any time of day, any day. All messages get answered, and no one is left alone with their problems.

According to the feedback and comments the Sua varten Somessa-project receives from their clients, the harassment they've experienced often seems to be normalized and minimized. In the world of young people, online harassment in the form of death threats, being pressured into sending nude photos and even extortion is sadly very common. When asked whether their clients have experienced harassment online, even the responses seem to dismiss the severity of the harassment they have experienced.

The social media accounts spread information on online harassment, help people recognize harassment and bullying as well as shed light on setting your personal limits when interacting

with others on social media. The activity of the social media account makes it more accessible to their target group. The Sua varten Somessa-project has accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and TikTok (Sua varten Somessa).

### 3.2 Sekasin-chat

In May 2016 Mental Health Finland MIELI opened a chat service aimed at young people (ages 12-29). The chat service was first open for a one-week test period and was re-opened in January 2017. The Sekasin-chat service has ever since been up and running every single day from 9am to midnight. Sekasin Collective, a consortium coordinated by the Finnish Mental Health Association (MIELI Suomen Mielenterveys ry), the Finnish Red Cross (Suomen Punainen Risti), Settlementtiliitto and SOS-Lapsikylä, is responsible for maintaining and coordinating the chat operations. The main goal of the chat is promoting mental health and prevent problems relating to it (Sekasin-chat).

The chat service is completely anonymous on both sides, neither the client nor the worker knows anything about each other (apart from what is shared in the chat). The sharing of any personal information is optional for the client and all chats are confidential. Each discussion lasts 45 minutes, and the client holds the ball when it comes to the topic they want to discuss.

The Sekasin Collective offers additional trainings and seminars for the employees as well as the volunteers working in the chat, which are free. There is also an online material bank made available for all the employees and volunteers to further educate themselves on different topics relating to supporting the client.

### 3.3 Ylitse MentorApp

Ylitse MentorApp is an application to help young people struggling with anxiety, depression, loneliness, trauma, addiction, identity, and any other problems or issues in their life was launched in 2019, developed as a result in the Ylitse-project (2016-2019), created by SOS-Lapsikylä and funded by STEA (Funding centre for social welfare and health organizations). The Ylitse MentorApp offers peer support to anything the person is going through and lets you find and choose mentors based on what you need. The app is free to use, anonymous, confidential, and safe. The mentors on the app are professionals from different social sector associations such as Yeesi ry, Sininauhasäätiö and Auta Lasta ry (SOS Lapsikylä).

The mentors are volunteers who have been trained by the organizations behind the app. They aim to offer peer support for the people using the app, and the clients are free to choose their own mentors based on their profiles on the app, in which the mentors introduce themselves and share a little about what they have gone through.

### 3.4 Someturva

Someturva (translates to social media security) is an anonymous digital service, which helps people deal with and solve problems and situations they face in social media and elsewhere on the Internet. They offer legal assessment, concrete recommendations for actions on how to resolve the situation and give advice on how to stay strong mentally in these situations. The offered services and advice are always personal and tailored to the client's situation.

Someturva offers different kinds of packages for people depending on their situation. The services aren't free (range from 11,90€/month to 29,90€/month or alternatively from 89,90€/case to 189,90€/case), which makes Someturva different from the other services introduced in this thesis, but the offered help is a great asset with combating online harassment. The packages include 24/7 support in the Someturva app, the assessment and proposed solution to the client's case, a personal consultation with a Someturva expert and a guaranteed case processing in one working day.

Someturva also offers a service called SomeBuddyPRO which is intended for work or other communities. According to Someturva, the three areas of digital occupational safety are predicting the risks of social media and digital environments, protecting your employees from harassment, and influencing your organization's ability to operate in digital environments effectively and actively.

Although most clients of Someturva find out about the services after they have been targeted, the service also offers valuable information on protecting yourself from future attacks. There is also a blog on the website which contains a wide variety of different topics and subcategories of online harassment such as what happens after you report online harassment to the police, what is revenge porn, are intimate photos sent without consent a cybercrime, etc. There are also multiple trainings organized and offered by Someturva, to which you can sign-up on their website (Someturva, 2022).

### 3.5 Nonviolent communication

Nonviolent communication is a method to communicate with a person using a set of skills available to anyone. This practice was developed by clinical psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg in the 1960s and 1970s. It is an integration of four things: consciousness, language, communication and means of influence (The Center for Nonviolent Communication, 2020).

Nonviolent communication consists of four key components: observation, feelings, needs and requests. This is the repeated process within the practice: observe what is happening, how the observation makes you feel, connect to the needs behind those feelings and make a request to get those needs fulfilled. Each feeling, whether positive or negative comes from a need either

being met or not met. Nonviolent communication also teaches to take responsibility of your feelings, instead of pushing the blame on someone else (Rosenberg, 2015).

Utilizing nonviolent communication against cyberbullying is possible, although difficult as conveying compassion through text can be challenging. A key part of nonviolent communication is emphasizing, facial expressions and the tone of one's voice, elements you can't carry onto online arguments done via text. To effectively communicate nonviolently online it is important to not counter abuse with abuse. Pay close attention to the words you use and avoid using language that blocks compassion (Martin, 2017.)

Offering empathy to someone actively attacking you online can feel extremely exposing, as you make yourself vulnerable to even more attacks. It is, however, an effective way to defuse violence and if utilized successfully empathy is the key to connecting with the person behind the incoming attacks. If you want someone to hear what you have to say, you first need to be able to empathize with what makes them behave the way they do. Marshall B. Rosenberg believed fully in seeing the beauty in every person, even and sometimes especially the ones that attacked him verbally (Rosenberg, 2015). This philosophy should be spread more especially in online communities as there is a person behind every screen and connecting to that person is the key to solving most online arguments.

#### 4 Presentation of portfolio outputs

My thesis is in portfolio format. This format offers the freedom and opportunity to study and process the topic from different perspectives and mediums. I felt the format was fitting for this specific topic because online harassment has so much to cover and process as well as many points of view to consider: The bully, who is often taking out their trauma onto an innocent victim. The victim, who mostly is just in the wrong place at the wrong time and says the "wrong thing" that triggers the bully. The bystanders, who witness the bullying and don't do anything. The defenders, who try to help the victim. And finally, the helpers who jump in to help the bully. Add to that the whole level of moderators and managers, even law enforcement, and you're looking at another group of people and new points of view in an online harassment case.

The portfolio can be found at <https://sawnah.wixsite.com/mycombatdiary/portfolio>. It consists of theory on the topic as well as different kinds of media relating to it. The portfolio is divided into five sections: introduction, online harassment, history, nonviolent communication, and the conclusion.

To begin educating people about online harassment, I needed to dive into the terms and methods of cyberbullying. I introduced the reader to targeted harassment, stalking, defamation, doxing, impersonating, trolling and gaslighting. There are countless of terms I left out, such as astroturfing (dissemination or amplification content using fake accounts) and zoombombing (hijacking a virtual meeting and disrupting communication) which goes to show there is much more to learn. The topics I chose for the portfolio are what people most commonly face when targeted negatively online by cyberbullies.

My portfolio serves as an information package to anyone who needs to learn about online harassment, its methods, its history and how and where to begin combating it. It can and should be utilized by social and health care professionals, as online harassment is an ever-growing phenomenon and effectively preventing the harm it causes should be a priority in the social field. Online harassment greatly affects the wellbeing of the targeted individual and should be taken seriously. I chose to focus on the nonviolent communication when it comes to the solutions as I believe that is where the answer lies. Too many people fall to the cycle of hate and abuse when targeted and as we've come to realize, reporting, and blocking rarely makes a difference. But if we can overcome the pain and provocation we feel when targeted and choose to respond with compassion and kindness, no matter what, I believe we can deal with the harassment better and it has a chance of reaching the attacker as well.

## 5 Conclusions and reflection

I began this thesis with a small base knowledge of the theme and things relating to it and I'm ending it with so much new and valuable information. I felt I was picking a topic and a question that had no answer but discovering multiple services that support victims of online harassment gave me a new type of motivation to keep this thesis and this fight going. I hope to be able to become an asset to help combat online harassment in the future and this thesis is only the first step for me to do so.

There are multiple platforms online, not just social media but chat and networking services, and all these platforms need to have a policy for online harassment. Thankfully, most of them already do: the report and block options on most if not all social media sites for example. They don't always work and sometimes the process can be very slow, but it's still extremely important that the function exists. In chat communities, there are administrators and moderators who handle cases of cyberbullying and online harassment.

When it comes to cybercrimes, the authorities handle them the best they can. This process is also slow, and it can feel excruciating to wait for help to come if you're the victim of harassment. However, in most cases of online harassment, law enforcement does not pursue

the cyberbully. It mostly comes down to whether the victim is in any actual danger or has suffered significant damages or losses due to the online harassment.

Due to this, I believe the social and healthcare sectors are where the answer lies to combating online harassment. There's already a lot being done, as we've discovered above, but we need to be able to do more. There will always be bullies and there will always be cyberbullies, and while getting to the source of the bullying to prevent it is important, so is taking care of the victims of bullying. Some people online choose to fight fire with fire, but I believe that only prolongs the cycle of bullying. The answer we need to focus on as social and healthcare professionals is kindness, towards the victims but also towards the people we perceive as bullies. It may sound like a cliché and like utopistic ramblings, and it will not work in all cases, but it is the approach we should take. Educating yourself and one another about the terms, methods and world of online harassment is the very first step towards not only combating the phenomenon but also to start preventing it. A lot of the actions and changes that have occurred in the history of online harassment have taken heavy tolls: the first laws against cyberbullying weren't enacted until a teenager killed herself. It should not have to take that much for change to come. Speaking out about these matters and spreading information, making these terms and methods concrete actions that have names, this is the best way to forward.

The world of online harassment is a scary one and in my opinion this thesis only scratched the very surface of it. Further research can and should be done on the topic to educate not only the researcher but the world. The more we spread information about this, the better we can start fighting the problem. There are so many kids and teenagers who at the time of writing this struggle with bullying and harassment and don't talk about it. They don't tell their teachers or their parents either because of the fear of making it worse or the shame they are forced to feel thinking it's somehow their fault. We need to be able to change this way of thinking, to teach people it's okay to talk about these things and they don't need to carry these thoughts and fears alone.

Social workers often attempt to get involved before any damage gets done in any situation and I think that should also be the aim when it comes to online harassment. A lot of damage can be avoided and prevented by simply getting the information out on how to protect yourself online. What has happened to the saying "Don't talk to strangers" or "Don't trust people on the Internet"? It seems people are quick to publicly share information about themselves online, you can find anyone anywhere with a few clicks and most profiles online are public and full of personal information. This simply isn't safe and while it's a nice feeling to be seen online and to share what's going on with your life, it only takes one person to snap and decide they don't like you to practically destroy you online. One of the key elements to preventing online harassment is to effectively hide your personal details on the Internet.

I intend to continue this road, to further educate both myself and others on the world of online harassment. I hope future social and health care professionals find this thesis useful and informative and use it in their own work. I have gathered a base knowledge of online harassment, the terms and methods surrounding it, a glance at the history and misogyny in online harassment and a list of services to help prevent online harassment as well as support the victims of online harassment. For people who wish to educate themselves on the topics mentioned above, I believe this thesis serves as a great place to start.

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