The issue of bullying via the Internet and what parents can do about it was addressed Monday night at a seminar at Pittston Area High School.

Dr. Sameer Hinduja, co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center at Florida Atlantic University, speaks Monday at Pittston Area High School as part of a conference on bullying.

Niko J.Kallianiotis/For The Times Leader

“Addressing Cyberbullying, Sexting, and Unwise Social Networking: The Role of Parents” is part of the two-day conference on bullying sponsored by the Northeastern Pennsylvania Diversity Education Consortium, and co-sponsored by The Times Leader and Guard Insurance Group.

The event addressed cyberbullying and the safe use of electronic devices.

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D., the co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center at Florida Atlantic University, discussed the dangers of the electronic media for more than an hour and addressed individual concerns from the audience.

An assistant professor of criminology and a published author on the subject, he showed many online examples of the dangers to not only adolescents, but also younger children.

With adolescent use of the Internet at 93 percent, schoolyard bullying (defined as being mean, disrespectful, or hateful) has evolved into cyberbullying with the use of a computer or cell phone.

Hinduja cited statistics that held everyone’s attention:

• One in three children in the United States has been bullied by someone they know.
• One in three has been bullied while playing a game.

• One in two has been bullied by cell phone.

• Almost half have been bullied on the social networking site, Facebook.

Hinduja said online use has evolved with a lack of supervision by the firms involved. Screen names are virtually anonymous, and it is easier to be cruel in text versus vocally, he said.

Finally, he said, family computers are moving to the bedroom from a family area.

Hinduja also addressed an area that has been in local news -- sexting. Sexting is the sending or receiving of sexually suggestive or explicit text or pictures by cell phone. Some students in the Tunkhannock Area School District faced legal trouble in 2009 over the sending and receiving of racy pictures via cell phone.

Hinduja said statistics show 13 percent of teens have received naked or semi-naked images from someone in school and 8 percent have sent them.

All of this is not an epidemic, he said, and there are things parents can do, such as communicating with their kids, especially early.

Parents also need to watch their children’s behavior, he said, and watch what they’re accessing on the computer, by phone, and through online games.

If children have a Facebook account, become one of their friends, Hinduja advised parents. Parents should ask what sites their children and their friends visit, he said.

He also said parents should check all privacy settings for any device being used by their child. He suggested a parent should Google his or her child’s name occasionally to see what activity shows, and if there are real concerns there are numerous software programs to monitor Internet use.

He said Facebook also offers “A Parent’s Guide To Facebook” at no cost.

He said the first priority is to make sure the child is safe. The next step is to collect evidence of the activity. The school, other parents and even the police should be involved if the activity is dangerous or if it involves possible violence or illegality.

As part of the two-day event , Hinduja will be talking to two groups of middle school students from numerous local schools today, explaining the dangers of the Net, from bullying to the very real problem with Facebook or other social site postings affecting future college, job or other goals.