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## **Navigating the digital age: Understanding and addressing cyberbullying behaviour issues in adolescents at school level**

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### **Abstract**

One of the recent transformative shifts in society that has taken the world by storm is the rise of internet culture, fundamentally altering the mindset of our populace. This shift is often termed as technological determinism. As an increasing number of teenagers engage with social networking platforms, a concerning phenomenon known as cyberbullying has emerged. Cyberbullying entails the use of the internet as a medium to post derogatory and harmful comments about individuals, significantly impacting their personal and social reputation. The repercussions of such bullying are challenging to endure, especially when critical remarks are publicly accessible, leading to a severe dent in the individual's standing within society. In the current landscape of our educational institutions, cyberbullying has morphed into a pervasive issue that detrimentally affects students' overall well-being and academic performance. This form of social criticism can inflict lasting harm on an individual. It has the potential to destabilize an individual's mental equilibrium, profoundly altering their personality and self-confidence. Cyberbullying victims often grapple with anxiety, fear, depression, diminished academic achievements, and in some cases, even dropout from school. These distressing experiences result in a loss of self-esteem, leaving them overwhelmed, vulnerable, and seeking revenge, feeling exposed, humiliated, and socially isolated. Their attitudes towards school turns negative, often leading to disinterest in education and life in general. This paper delves into the multifaceted aspects of cyberbullying within schools, delving into its prevalence, various manifestations, effects, root causes, and potential remedies. It aims to equip educators, parents, and policymakers with a comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying. By drawing upon a diverse array of research findings and expert perspectives, this paper seeks to provide insights into combating this problem effectively, offering valuable approaches to address cyberbullying issues and mitigate its detrimental impacts.

**Keywords:** Internet, social media, adolescents and cyberbullying behaviour

### **Introduction**

Modern technologies and behaviours have altered in a world that is constantly evolving and changing due to technology. The pace of technological advancement has accelerated over the past few decades to keep up with needs, and it is now occasionally impossible to keep up. The negative effects of technology, such as cyberbullying, should not be disregarded despite the many positive aspects it has for our life. In this way, technology, according to Ayas and Horzum (2014) <sup>[10]</sup>, improves the lives of individuals who use it, but it also carries the risk of doing harm if it is applied in ways other than those for which it was designed. According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries of 2020, the definition of "cyber" is "connected with electronic communication networks, especially the internet." Thus, it encompasses bullying that occurs in online settings, such as on computers and mobile phones.

The use of technical gadgets has expanded in society as a result of technological growth, particularly the changes and advances encountered in the development of mobile technologies. Young people are very interested in the hardware and software advancements made for mobile technologies, which leads to a rise in users and time spent using mobile technologies. Face-to-face interaction has been supplanted by instant messaging, social networks, and blogs, which are among the most popular tools and ways of personal engagement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) <sup>[7]</sup>. Along with the good benefits that mobile technology including these apps, such as smart phones, have on both social and academic

life, there are some circumstances that arise as a result of intensive usage of such technologies. For instance, according to Horzum and Ayas (2014) <sup>[10]</sup>, even those who closely monitor the advancement of information technologies frequently use them to damage others in addition to their intended uses.

Li (2006) <sup>[14]</sup> emphasized the positive impact of incorporating computers into classroom activities. However, the presence of electronic communication devices in classrooms can pose significant challenges, particularly regarding their inadvertent use. Cyberbullying stands out as a prominent behavior to consider among various negative outcomes stemming from the pervasive use of electronic gadgets in both daily and academic life.

### Cyberbullying

According to Kowalski and Limber (2007) <sup>[13]</sup>, cyberbullying is a phenomenon that aims to negatively impact the lives of others by using information and communication technologies. As a comprehensive term, it encompasses related ideas like online bullying, electronic bullying, and internet harassment. Tokunaga (2010) <sup>[27]</sup> defined cyberbullying as "an act of repeatedly transmitting hostile and offensive messages aimed at causing harm and or discomfort to others by using electronic and or digital media tools by an individual or group of individuals," while Patchin and (Hinduja, 2006) <sup>[5]</sup> defined it as "willful and repeated negative conduct given through an electronic text." (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Wade & Beran, 2011) <sup>[5, 28]</sup>. Cyberbullying conduct is the use of electronic information and digital tools, such as social media, blogs, email, text messages, mobile phones, etc., to purposely and frequently harass another person's psychological well-being, whether an individual or a group (Linne & Angilletta, *et al.*, 2016) <sup>[16]</sup>. Greene (2000) identified five key characteristics of bullying after researching definitions in academic literature: (a) the bully intends to inflict harm or fear on the victim, (b) the aggressive behaviour occurs repeatedly, (c) the victim is not prompted by the bully's conduct, (d) the bully perpetrates in familiar social groups, and (e) that is the bully is perceived as more powerful (either socially or physically) than the victim. Kowalski and Limber (2007) <sup>[13]</sup> in their study reported that, 66.6% of respondents reported experiencing some sort of cyberbullying at school level and instant messaging was identified as the main medium used by bullies online. Chat rooms, emails, and websites were the next most popular channels.

### Prevalence and Forms of Cyberbullying

In the era of digital advancements, cyberbullying has emerged as a significant and concerning issue globally, particularly among school-aged children. Studies on cyberbullying show that middle school and college students are equally as likely as adults to experience cyberbullying for the first time (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Reesa, 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>. Cyberbullying is becoming more common in schools according to numerous researches, which is worrying. This type of bullying includes a range of strategies, such as impersonation, disseminating false information, making cruel comments, harassing someone online, and spreading rumours. It is difficult for victims of cyberbullying to get away from the anguish because these platforms - social media, instant messaging, and online gaming communities - have all become popular venues for

this practice. There aren't many studies that look at the connection between age and cyberbullying. However, a number of important studies offer some first data on the ages of those who engage in cyberbullying. Slonje and Smith (2008) <sup>[26]</sup> examined occurrences of cyberbullying among students in Sweden and discovered that younger students, ages 12 to 15, experienced cyberbullying far more frequently than older students, ages 15 to 20.

### Consequences of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can have negative effects that may or may not heal for a very long time period. Victims frequently report elevated levels of anxiety, despair, and social isolation. In turn, poor academic performance, a rise in absenteeism, and in severe situations, suicide thoughts might result from these emotional issues. Cyberbullying offenders may also have unfavourable outcomes, such as disciplinary measures, legal implications, and harm to their own mental health. The researchers Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, (2005) <sup>[5]</sup> reported that victim and bullies were low performers in schools, while other researchers found that poor social relationship of adolescent's effects their academic performance (Patchin & Hinduja 2007) <sup>[6]</sup>. Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, (2005) <sup>[21]</sup> also pointed that adolescents' peer relationship and cyberbullying in schools could negatively affects students' academic performance. Graham, Bellmore, & Juvonen (2003) stated that low academic performance and skipping in schools is due to traditional bullying among adolescent's teenagers who becomes the victim of cyberbullying and these teenager victims of bullying showed a decrease in the concentration of learning, increase in school's absenteeism and decrease in school's achievement.

Furthermore, students who endured cyberbullying often lagged behind their peers in academic progress and, in some cases, opted to discontinue their education. Bullying frequently inflicts mental distress upon victims, shattering their self-esteem and subsequently causing a decline in their academic performance (Myburgh, Poggenpoel, and Hixon, 2009) <sup>[18]</sup>. Teenagers subjected to cyberbullying displayed a noticeable decrease in their school achievements.

### Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying in India, like in many other countries, takes various forms and can have severe consequences for victims.

#### 1. Cyberstalking

In cases of cyber stalking, a cyber-bully meticulously tracks a victim's online activities. The bully may fabricate accusations and issue threats against the victim and their close associates. This behavior entails persistent, unwelcome online focus, messages, or menacing communications aimed at an individual, instigating fear and emotional turmoil (Reyns, Henson & Fisher, 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>. Moreover, cyberstalking can escalate into real-life situations, posing significant danger and severe threats to the victim and possibly their loved ones.

#### 2. Social Cyberbullying

Social cyberbullying entails spreading rumors, gossip, or embarrassing information about the victim to damage their reputation or social relationships through social media platforms. (Kowalski, Schroeder & Lattanner, 2014) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### 3. Exclusion or Ostracism

Cyberbullies intentionally isolate the victim from online gatherings, discussions, or engagements, provoking a sense of solitude and detachment. Ostracism, involves being ignored and excluded by either individuals or groups, poses a threat to the psychological and physical well-being of individuals. Such acts of ostracism can manifest in subtle ways, such as avoiding eye contact, or more overt ways, like completely ignoring the person's presence. Ostracism can be inflicted by people close to the victim or even by strangers (DePedro, Esqueda, & Gilreath, 2014) <sup>[11]</sup>.

### 4. Revenge Porn

Distributing intimate pictures or videos of someone without their consent with the intention of humiliating or harming them. It is strongly tied to sexual abuse and is also referred to as nonconsensual pornography. Such photographs might be shared as "revenge" by a current or former partner, or they might be threatened with distribution as a form of blackmail. (Drouin, Surbey, Stills & Patel, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### 5. Trolling

Trolling involves deliberately provoking or annoying others online through offensive or inflammatory comments to incite emotional reactions. (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014) <sup>[2]</sup>.

### 6. Impersonation

Establishing fictitious accounts or acting in someone else's place to disseminate false information or harm their reputation. Additionally, it may involve creating a false or synthetic identity or even representing oneself using another person's identification documents. (Nixon & Ronson, 2018) <sup>[19]</sup>.

### 7. Trickery

Trickery in cyberbullying mirrors exclusion but involves an element of deceit. In such scenarios, the bully pretends to befriend their target and carefully manipulates them into feeling safe. After gaining the target's trust, the bully breaches that trust by sharing the victim's confidential information and secrets with third parties often multiple ones. Such forms of cyberbullying can have profound psychological, emotional, and social ramifications, underscoring the importance of impactful prevention, intervention, and awareness programs.

### Cases of Cyberbullying victims

Ritika Sharma (name changed), a student enrolled in a prominent school in Delhi, faced a distressing situation involving a Facebook acquaintance whom she had unfriended months prior. This individual had garnered extensive personal information from Ritika, including her precise location, school address, and cell phone number. Shockingly, she had initially shared her phone number with the individual, who was later discovered to be operating under a false identity, using a fabricated name, photo, and phone number. In response to this incident, a program was organized by the Delhi police to raise awareness, cautioning all students against divulging personal details to strangers.

An important case to highlight while discussing cyberbullying and stalking is that of Kiku Kohli (name changed), which marked the first reported cyber stalking incident in India. Back in 2001, Kiku Kohli, a young

woman, lodged a complaint about someone impersonating her on social media and deliberately subjecting her to lewd phone calls from various numbers, including international calls. Upon receiving the complaint, the Delhi Police swiftly took action, tracing the IP addresses and apprehending the individual under Section 509 of the Indian Penal Code. It's noteworthy that the IT Act was not applied in this case, as it was not yet in effect at the time of the complaint.

### Preventive and Intervention Strategies

It is essential to establish clear guidelines and IT policies within schools, colleges, and universities. Additionally, providing teachers with comprehensive training on the appropriate utilization of cyber resources, coupled with preventative measures against such crimes, is imperative. Choi (2008) <sup>[3]</sup> emphasized on the effectiveness of organizing seminars in universities and extension lectures in schools, colleges and Universities for promoting knowledge about cybercrime as these programmes can play a vital role in creating awareness among students and teachers towards cybercrime in terms of safety and security. In senior secondary schools, combating cyberbullying requires a multifaceted strategy. Workshops, seminars, and interactive conversations regarding cyberbullying should be prioritized in schools. An intimidation can be created by establishing explicit policies against cyberbullying, both inside and outside of school grounds. An effective ICT policy framework is essential for educational institutions, spanning elementary, secondary, and senior secondary levels. Robust filters must be deployed across schools, colleges, and universities to block inappropriate and pornographic websites. Within ICT labs, a display of these restricted site names serves as a cautionary measure, alerting students about potentially harmful content. Cultivating a nurturing environment where children feel safe reporting cyberbullying incidents hinges on a collaborative effort involving educators, parents, and mental health experts.

### Promoting Digital Literacy and Empathy

Educators in schools, colleges, and universities have a crucial role in guiding adolescents on the responsible use of cell phones and various media applications. Their focus should be on fostering positive online behavior within the cyber world among young individuals. Teachers ought to assist adolescents in honing their decision-making abilities, emphasizing respect, personal safety, empathy towards others, and a clear comprehension of the repercussions associated with poor decision-making. Asefeh (2007) <sup>[1]</sup> emphasized the necessity of coordinated efforts between parents and teachers to effectively propagate awareness regarding cyberbullying and cyber-crimes among youth, prioritizing safety-related issues. The Information Technology Act of 2000, amended in 2008, stands as one of the legal frameworks addressing internet crimes and delineating penalties in India. Moreover, in the context of combating cyberbullying, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions and laws can be instrumental, and a list of these provisions is outlined below.

- Sections 66(D), 66(E), and 67 delineate penalties for cyberbullying actions, encompassing the misuse of personal information, dissemination of inappropriate content, or posting derogatory information on social media.

- Disseminating or forwarding pornographic material falls under Section 67 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Electronic publication or transmission of sexually explicit material is covered by Section 67A, IPC. Sending defamatory e-mails in violation of Section 499 IPC constitutes a punishable offense. Actions, words, or gestures intended to offend a woman's modesty are addressed in Section 509 of the IPC.
- Section 292A pertains to printing, selling, or advertising obscene, defamatory, or slanderous material or materials intended for exploitation. Making sexually suggestive comments amounts to sexual harassment under Section 354 of the Criminal Code. Privacy Invasion is covered by Section 66E. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, in its press release on 'Digital Exploitation of Children,' highlights that sections 354A and 354D of the IPC impose penalties for cyberbullying and cyber stalking against women.

### Conclusion

The addressing of cyberbullying behaviour issues in schools necessitates a holistic approach encompassing awareness, education, policy enforcement, and mental health support. Creating a secure and inclusive digital environment for teenagers' demands concerted efforts from educators, parents, and policymakers, rooted in a deep understanding of cyberbullying dynamics and the implementation of comprehensive strategies. Such an approach allows students to flourish academically and emotionally without the looming fear of online harassment. In this age of ubiquitous information and technology, it is imperative to educate the younger generation about the risks and benefits associated with the use of cyber media and social networking platforms. These platforms wield significant influence over public opinion, underscoring the need for social media to act responsibly and provide accurate information. However, in the absence of robust regulatory mechanisms for the internet and social media, educators bear the responsibility of guiding young minds to discern right from wrong, mitigating moral degradation among teenagers. Safeguarding the ethical and moral compass of the youth amidst the vast expanse of the internet and social media is a paramount duty. It is crucial for individuals not to unquestioningly accept all the information presented on these platforms and to cross-verify it from reliable sources. While acknowledging that the internet and social media are enduring facets of our society, it is the ethical duty of educators to ensure that the younger generation remains on a virtuous path, recognizing their pivotal role in advancing both our society and nation.

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