

CYBERBULLYING: AN INSIDIOUS TREND

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ABSTRACT

Stating that the students who are bullied suffer from psychological problems like low confidence and fear of failure in academic subjects, the author states that they also suffer from problems of concentration, fear of loneliness, and are highly stressed.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Social media

INTRODUCTION

As usual Hanifa and Sujata, both were going to school to fetch their sons to get them back home. However, today Hanifa found Sujata somewhat disturbed; and she asked - "What is the matter? Why are you silent today? Please share your troubles with me so that you will get some relief.....!" But Sujata burst out into tears and sobbingly said, "Hanifaji, all the classmates of my son shout very loudly teasing him 'Maruti, Maruti go to temple. Do not come to school!' 'HIP-HIP-HUP-HUP'. Hanifa immediately interrupted and asked astonishingly "BUT-WHY?" Sujata replied "Because his name is Maruti! My son is really completely disturbed and he is fully reluctant to go to school!" "Oh! So sad indeed! What a pity.....!" Hanifa exclaimed! What else she could do?

All that has been stated above is not new. Such things do happen; and it is really very difficult to keep a control over such activities! No doubt, world of today is filled with advancement of technology. Yet, regret to say that is equally filled with various types of crimes too. Surprisingly, a crime like bullying has entered the field of education! Significantly, it is a fact that the emergence of Ubiquitous Information Technology has drastically changed the world and that of our children too! The digital world provides many experiences - both positive as well as negative - and if left unchecked or unsupervised, especially in case of children, it can have dangerous outcomes - CYBERBULLYING IS ONE OF THEM!

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a category of bullying that occurs in the digital realm/medium of electronic text (Wong-LO & Bullock, 2011).

Cyberbullying describes those forms of bullying in which people use electronics to affront, insult, threaten, harass, and/or intimidate a peer (Berger, 2007; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Through cyberbullying, a victim suffers from being made fun of by use of his/her morphed photos over the net (Berger, 2007).

The definition of Cyberbullying was broadened from an Indian perspective by eminent criminologist, Dr. K. Jaishankar (2009) as: "Abuse/harassment by teasing or insulting victims body shape, intellect, family background, dress sense, mother tongue, place of origin, attitude, race, caste, class, name calling, using modern telecommunication networks such as mobile phones (SMS/MMS) and Internet (chat rooms, emails, notice boards and groups)."

Parry Aftab, the executive director of WireSafety, a site to help Cyberbullying victims, has defined Cyberbullying as "Any cyber-communication or publication posted or sent by a minor online, by instant message, e-mail, website, diary site, online profile, interactive game,

handheld device, cell phone, game device, digital camera or video, webcam or use of the interactive digital device that is intended to frighten, embarrass, hurt, set up, cause harm, extort, or otherwise target another minor” (WiredSafety).

Still one more definition of Cyberbullying is as stated below: Cyberbullying is “When a minor uses technology as a weapon to intentionally target and hurt another minor” (WiredSafety). Cyberbullying as defined by Wired Safety needs to have minors on both sides, as target and a cyberbully. If there aren’t minors on both sides of the communication, it is considered as Cyber-harassment, not Cyberbullying.

Internet has touched every aspect of human life, bringing ease in connecting people around the globe and has also made information available to huge strata of the society at the click of a button. With advancement, came unforeseen banes of cyber offences. Cyberbullying is one of them. Cyberbullying occurs through the use of ICT. “An aggressive act or behavior that is carried out using electronic means by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008). Cyberbullying is a barrier in the way of student well-being, bullying takes place in each and every place, whether it is classroom, playground, home or community. It starts from home as siblings tease each other, in the same way in school students tease (bully) each other. Bullying behavior affects children negatively.

Bullying repeatedly occurs in school-going students. This problem affects all the students whether they bully, the victim, the bully victim or the witness. Bullying includes verbal and physical assaults, threats, jokes, insulting behavior and facial expression. The bullying behavior is a deliberate behavior which is usually repeated and causes harm to the person who has been bullied. It can be verbal bullying, physical bullying, psychological bullying or social bullying.

Cyberbullying takes place when an aggressive act or behavior is carried out by using electronic means by an individual or a group repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself. This occurs through the use of ICT. The connection between cyber and traditional bullying is very much important because the majority of the time if the student is experiencing cyberbullying, then there is a high probability that s/he is unfortunately experiencing traditional bullying as well while attending school. Close to half of the cyber victims have no idea who the predators are. Culture and engagement in the traditional bullying are strong predators not only for cyberbullying but also for cyber victimization. Gender too plays a significant role because male compared to their female counterparts are more likely to be cyberbullies!

Bullies come in all sizes, shapes and abilities. They do not need to be larger to dominate their victims. However, bullies are typically stronger and more physically as well as verbally aggressive than their victims. Those who bully tend to be hyperactive and disruptive. Victims of bullying are characterized as anxious and insecure; and they often are not connected to any social network; and have less effective social skills. Craig (1998) has stated that “Bullying usually involves more than the bully and the victim: peers are present in 85% of bullying episodes in classrooms and playgrounds.”

SOME COMMON TERMS IN CYBERBULLYING

- i. Flaming: Sending, angry, rude, vulgar messages about a person via e-mail or other text message.
- ii. Online harassment: Repeatedly sending offensive messages via e-mail or other text messaging to a person.

- iii. Cybers talking: Online harassment that includes threats of harm or is excessively intimidating.
- iv. Trolling: Sending harmful, untrue or cruel statements about a person to their people or posting such materials online.
- v. Impersonating: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting materials that makes that person look bad.
- vi. Trickery or Outing: Sending or posting materials about a person that contains sensitive, private or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages and images.
- vii. Exclusion: Cruelly excluding someone from an online group.

Cyberbullying has thus no single definition. The absence of a universal cyberbullying definition is due to a lack of conceptual clarity (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is the most prevalent amongst the current tech-savvy generation, which predominantly consists of children and adolescents (Kowalske et al., 2012). In Australia, children as young as eight are experiencing Cyberbullying, Cyber-stalking and Virtual Teasing (Bamford, 2004). Estimates of Cyberbullying prevalence vary widely between studies and samples (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). For example, while Kowalski and Limber (2007) reported that 11% and 4% of students aged 11-13 years were the victims and perpetrators of Cyberbullying, Li (2007) identifies victimization and perpetration levels of 25% and 15% respectively in children aged 11-12 years. Despite inconsistencies in estimations of current prevalence, as technology continues to advance and becomes increasingly available in less developed countries, the number of individuals influenced by Cyberbullying is predicted to increase. Rising prevalence of Cyberbullying combined with apaucity of available information and the suggestion that those responsible for adolescent welfare may be ill equipped to address the issue, highlights the importance of training teachers in the Cyberbullying experience. In the recent report conducted by Child Rights and You (CRY) and published in 'The Times of India', one in every three school students of Delhi NCR who use the Internet, suffer from Cyberbullying. The harm on bullied can last for a very long period of time as it shakes the bullied self-efficacy (Willard, 2007). In certain cases, suicide has been reported as a result of cyberbullying (Koloff, 2008).

India has been observed with highest global rates, with nearly 37% of teens experiencing online harassment in 2025. In United States, 29% of preteens (ages 9-12) reported online harassment in 2025 while 36% of 13-17 years old were affected. United Kingdom with around 19% of children aged 10-15 years experienced online bullying. In Europe, 31% of students reported at least one instance of harassment during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Ahmed, Faisal and Javed (2023) reported that Facebook is the majorly affected social media site where 40.3% of respondents have faced some type of cyberbullying compared to other platforms. Commonly, disabled people are more prone to cyberbullying than normal people. Through survey data in total, 4.2% of respondents have some kind of disability in which almost 40% of them have been the victim of cyberbullying, while 49.4% of the total respondents have experienced some type of cyberbullying. Many cyberbullying surveys show a correlation with the survey data analysis and according to the stats it has been observed that females (54.2%) are more cyberbullied than males (46.8%). Cyberbullying harms all age

groups, whether they are tweens, teens, or youths. Those who have experienced cyberbullying mostly have developed social anxiety or disconnected themselves from social networks. Measured by the percentage of respondents, 40.7% have cyberbullied someone online and 82.6% have been the victim of cyberbullying which shows the existence of activeness of perpetrators and its effects on victims.

EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING

It has been realized today that the impact of cyberbullying on victims is more pronounced than the effects of traditional face-to-face bullying. With cyberbullying, physical separation of the victim as well as aggressor does not guarantee cessation of bullying (Mesch, 2009). Further, certain extreme cases in the countries like the United States, New Zealand and Japan have resulted in the victim committing suicide (Bamford, 2004, To mazin and Smith, 2007), Kowalski and Limber (2007) have reported that the anonymity of cyberspace can be particularly harmful to cyberbully victims who may suspect everyone they meet, of being the culprit. As a result, the potential of long-term damage to psychological health remains!

Cyberbullying thus, results in much serious harm on the bullied (Besey, 2004). It undermines entire school climate by interfering with victim's school functioning. Because of this, sometimes, a few students do face serious mental health problems as well as safety problems (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Through cyberbullying, a victim suffers from teasing, lies, rude and mean comments, rumors, aggressive or threatening comments, and/or suffers from being made: fun of by the use of his/her morphed photos over the net (Berger, 2007). Studies have asserted that cyberbullying is far more dangerous than traditional bullying because of the associated anonymity (Mishna et al., 2009). The assaulted victims suffer on their personal space and the fact that potentially harmful: messages and other such offences can spread to large groups in time is further horrifying (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008).

Bullying not only affects the victim but also affects the bystanders. Person doing this harmful act is usually less aware of the consequences and the effects that his actions are causing. The students who are bullied are more likely to be involved in behavioral problems like domestic violence, criminality, drug abuse and many other dangerous power games in their adulthood or at any other stage. These students also exhibit such physical symptoms like stomach pain, headache, sleeping problem, fear to go to school or fear of dark rooms or bathrooms, etc. Further, such students who are being constantly bullied also suffer from psychological problems such as low confidence, think themselves as stupid or they have fear of failure in academic subjects, suffer from problems of concentration, fear of loneliness, are highly stressed, etc. Students who are bullied develop feeling of guilt – 'that is my fault, that is why I am being bullied.' Most important thing to note is the fact that repeated bullying gives effect to suicide (Hinduja & Pachin, 2010). Serious consequences are seen worldwide.

CAUSES OF CYBERBULLYING

Kassabri, Gadala and Daciut (2012) have identified causes of cyberbullying like using computer for more hours a day and giving their password to friends. Other risk factors are gender, age, etc. which have been found to be specific for only one category of cyberbullying. Causes are categorized as either internal or external. *Internal causes* include revenge, boredom, jealousy, trying out a new person or redirecting feelings, etc. *External causes* are non-confrontational when a cyberbully did not want to have a face-to-face encounter with the victim or express fear of actually facing the person. Song and oh (2018) identified bystander defender activity as low moral disengagement, low antisocial conformity, high perceived control of the situation and bad relationship with bullies were identified as significant predictors of a bystander's defending tendency.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Researchers are of the opinion that cyberbullying generally occurs at home and the role of parents and guardians becomes vital. Although most cyberbullying occurs outside of school (Déhue, et al., 2008). Research has suggested that the precipitating event often occurs at school and leads to cyberbullying at home (Cassidy et al., 2009). This suggests that cyberbullying, although mainly occurs beyond school hours, is related to school. It would have a negative impact on children and young people as they are being cyber bullied by other children from their school. Juvonen and Gross (2008) suggested that cyberspace is an extension of the school playground where the same children are exposed to victimization within school and in cyberspace. Thus, the role of school and teachers become vital in dealing with cyberbullying cases; much of the available literature indicates that a lot needs to be done in the area of cyberbullying. So, teachers, counselors and librarians too need to be equipped with the skill and knowledge about handling cyberbullying cases.

It is the demand of the hour that parents have to show more interest in inculcation of peace-oriented values and education at home. Education research consistently and convincingly demonstrates that students' achievement is improved by positive parental involvement as a partner in education. Parents can play an important role in imparting the peace education as: -

- Value and model lifelong learning
- Support and model respect for the schools, teachers and other staff
- Understand the curriculum and the importance of learning at home
- Supervise daily homework and encourage good learning habits
- Ensure that their child attends school daily and arrives punctually
- Provide for the physical and emotional wellbeing of their child
- Teach their child to accept responsibility for his/her actions
- Assist their children in recognizing and understanding their role in a local and global community

Based on the experiences and also psychological needs of the present day student-generation, certain useful strategies are to be made known to teachers as well as parents which are helpful in reducing the misconduct of the students.

- ✓ Teachers should try to help their pupils to start their day with good faith. They should try to find out the caliber of their students and not force them to select the subject of their choice.
- ✓ Teachers have to prepare them for standardized life by helping them to develop good habits.
- ✓ Students must be made to actively participate in all school activities like sports, group discussion, role-play, dramatization, etc. This will be helpful for students to become good friend, good neighbors, and good relationship with sibling, classmates and always a well-wisher of mankind. This will decrease the evilness.
- ✓ If the parents are vigilant of their sons and daughters from the very beginning, then their children will be free from all sort of evilness.

CONCLUSION

Bullying is difficult to stop in schools. It is just like a never-ending process because every year, a variety of students come from different backgrounds like caste, class, religion, race, etc. and each student brings some prejudices with him or her to schools about others! As seen earlier, there exist many reasons for bullying. However, bullying should not be underestimated because it might harm students in different ways. Each one has to be aware of this fact; hence, it should be taken seriously to sensitize students towards others bullying and its drastic impact on him or on her or on others.

Newspapers, daily soaps, TV or the films are full of exploitation of the weaker by the stronger or more powerful. Father killing son or son killing father, chains being snatched, women and girls being raped, mutilated, killed by the perverted persons, bloodsheds etc. are shown on TV which evokes no emotions as they are too many. People are getting used to it!! Feeling of inadequacy, rivalry, jealousy, frustration, competitions etc. are rampant among family members, relatives and friends. Each one wants more and more of everything and is therefore restless; peace within such situations looks like a mirage. Hence, it has been said by many authorities that learning is to bring out a peaceful living in the student. Student rage is very crucial and when noticed, parents or teachers should put a stop to the cyberbullying acts of the students.

The purpose of education goes beyond the propagation of knowledge. As Daniel Webster said, "Knowledge does not comprise all that is contained in the larger term of education. The feelings are to be disciplined. The passions are to be restrained. True and worthy motives are to be inspired..... And pure morality is to be inculcated in all circumstances."

It is also significant to bring about changes at the primary level itself if educators wish to bring modern reforms in the education system. This aspect justified the choice of ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION (ETE) trainees for the important task of helping cyberbullied children.

Cyberbullying is definitely a serious crime, and in the making of the cyberbullying laws, law makers should take the opinion of child psychologists. Law should be made considering the psychology of the people involved and the legal expertise of law enforcement. If law is not made, many of the cyberbullies will be left open and victims have to suffer never-ending consequences. Hence, educating a child does not mean merely training for livelihood!

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