The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescents: Defining Characteristics, Consequences, and Prevention Strategies

Kalpana Kumari[1], Roli Yadav[2]

[1,2]Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow

Abstract

Technological advancements have permeated every aspect of our lives and continue to shape our social interactions. While the benefits of technological progress are often acknowledged, it also brings about several negative consequences, such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, the use of electronic means to harass individuals, has become a prevailing issue in contemporary society, particularly affecting adolescents. The susceptibility of children and teenagers, who are undergoing a period of growth and risk-taking, makes them particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of cyberbullying. The rapid growth of global Internet usage and the widespread usage of social media among young individuals have led to an increase in the number of children and adolescents who have experienced cyberbullying or online victimization. With the proliferation of technology that keeps students connected to others around the clock, the frequency of cyberbullying is increasing. The effects of cyberbullying can be severe and long-lasting, causing victims to feel inadequate and self-conscious, and, in some instances, leading to suicide. This chapter will delve into the defining characteristics, types, methods, motivations, and consequences of cyberbullying, as well as strategies to prevent its occurrence. Adolescents' increased use of the internet and social networking sites has led to cyberbullying becoming a significant concern.

Keywords: Forms of Cyberbullying, Cyberbullying; consumption and implication. Psychological Impact, Prevention Strategy, Parental Meditation of Digital Usage

Introduction

The term "cyberbullying" has emerged to describe a type of bullying that occurs through electronic technology, such as texting, emailing, messaging on social networking sites, or using any other electronic device. This issue has become significant across the country, affecting a large portion of the adolescent population. Although cyberbullying has been occurring through text messages, emails, and chat rooms for some time, the number of cases has increased as adolescents have begun to use social networking sites more frequently, such as Facebook and Twitter, which offer many opportunities for young people to interact with one another. Unfortunately, these social media and social networking sites have also become common platforms for youth to engage in violent behaviour, including bullying and harassment of their peers.

Cyberbullying typically encompasses the recurrent use of technology to harass and upset others (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). It can involve various actions such as harassing, impersonating, slandering, and excluding the victim (Willard, 2007). There are a variety of motivations behind cyberbullying behaviors,

including seeking revenge, feeling jealous, being bored, and seeking approval (Varjas, Talley, Meyers, Parris, & Cutts, 2010). Due to the severe psychological, physical, and emotional consequences of cyberbullying (Van Geel, Goemans, Toprak, & Vedder, 2017), extensive research has been conducted to identify predictors that can aid in preventing and managing cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying, also known as online bullying, is a form of bullying or harassment that uses electronic means. It is a prevalent issue in today's society, particularly among teenagers who engage in bullying or harassment on social media sites. Cyberbullying behaviours encompass a range of actions, including spreading rumours about others, threatening individuals, making sexual remarks, disclosing a victim's personal information, and using hate speech. These behaviours are intended to cause harm and are often persistent, rather than isolated incidents. Victims of cyberbullying may experience a range of emotional responses, including suicidal thoughts, lowered self-esteem, anger, frustration, and depression. They may also feel scared and powerless as a result of being bullied by others. It is important to recognize and address cyberbullying to protect the well-being of those affected by it.

During childhood and adolescence, not only do individuals experience growth, but also an increased likelihood of taking risks. Peer pressure and impulsiveness, among other factors, can lead young people to engage in risky behaviour that they may not fully comprehend. These behaviours can be exacerbated by the use of digital technology, which provides a new form of interpersonal communication but also contributes to the dark side of young people's internet usage. Cyberbullying, which includes behaviours such as bullying, cyberstalking, and online dating abuse, is a growing concern among children and adolescents. It is important to recognize and address this issue in order to protect young people from harm. While research on cyberbullying is still in its early stages, it is widely recognized as a significant public health issue that has a profound impact on adolescents' behaviour, mental health, and development. The proliferation of social media platforms and the increasing adoption of the internet worldwide have exacerbated the problem, with the majority of children and adolescents experiencing cyberbullying or online victimization at some point in their lives. Cyberbullying allows bullies to operate beyond the constraints of time and space, creating new avenues for harassment with no geographical boundaries. The negative effects of cyberbullying are far-reaching, including invasions of personal privacy and the exacerbation of psychological disorders. Compared to traditional bullying, cyberbullying may have more severe consequences as perpetrators can act anonymously and connect with victims at any time. Victims of cyberbullying have been found to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, and are more likely to suffer from self-esteem problems and miss school.

Review of Literature

The paper reviews the association between cyberbullying and adolescent mental health, drawing from PubMed and the Virtual Health Library (BVS). It found prevalence rates ranging from 6.5% to 35.4% and identified factors like excessive internet use and online harassment contributing to cyberbullying. Victims and perpetrators experienced emotional and psychosomatic issues, social challenges, and heightened depressive symptoms, substance use, and suicidal behavior. The study underscores the need for health professionals to recognize and address the damaging effects of cyberbullying on adolescent well-being (Bottino, 2015).

Kowalski (2014) present critical review of cyberbullying research highlights the fragmented nature of existing literature and the need for a theoretical framework to understand this phenomenon. The general aggression model is proposed as a valuable framework, supported by meta-analytic findings indicating

strong associations between cyberbullying and normative beliefs about aggression, moral disengagement, stress, and suicidal ideation. Methodological considerations and sample characteristics serve as important moderators. The review underscores the necessity for future research to explore the incremental impact of cyberbullying on behavioral and psychological outcomes, particularly in comparison to traditional bullying. Overall, this review provides a foundation for further investigation into the complexities of cyberbullying and its implications for youth well-being.

The findings of Ang & Goh (2010) indicate a significant three-way interaction among affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and gender in relation to cyberbullying among adolescents. It was observed that at low levels of affective empathy, both boys and girls with low cognitive empathy exhibited higher cyberbullying scores. For boys with high affective empathy, this trend continued. However, cognitive empathy levels did not significantly impact cyberbullying behavior in girls. This highlights the importance of empathy training and fostering positive caregiver-child relationships to reduce cyberbullying. Further research is needed to replicate these findings and to develop and evaluate intervention programs that focus on enhancing empathy skills, promoting internet etiquette, and encouraging healthy online behavior. Such programs can contribute to creating a safer online environment and promoting prosocial behavior among young people.

Smith's (2008) study highlights cyberbullying as a significant form of harassment among adolescents, with distinct characteristics compared to traditional bullying. While less prevalent, cyberbullying occurs both inside and outside of school, predominantly through phone calls, text messages, and instant messaging. Age and gender differences were noted, with cyberbullying often perpetrated by a few students within the same year group. Despite its impact, many victims refrain from reporting incidents. The study emphasizes the need for further research and practical interventions to address cyberbullying effectively, including promoting coping strategies and increasing awareness among adolescents and educators.

Dehue's (2008) survey investigated cyberbullying prevalence and characteristics among young individuals, along with parental perceptions. Among 1,211 primary and secondary school pupils surveyed, 16% admitted to cyberbullying, and 23% reported being victims. Cyberbullying was predominantly anonymous and individualistic, occurring primarily at home. Common harassment methods included name-calling and gossiping. Youngsters typically ignored or retaliated against cyberbullying. Despite setting internet rules, parents underestimated their children's involvement and victimization experiences.

Li's (2006) study sheds light on the prevalence and characteristics of cyberbullying among adolescents. Findings reveal that nearly half of the students surveyed were victims of bullying, with about a quarter experiencing cyberbullying. Additionally, a majority of students reported knowing someone who had been cyberbullied. The study also highlights the underreporting of cyberbullying incidents by victims and bystanders to adults. Significant gender differences were observed, with males more likely to engage in bullying and cyberbullying, while female cyberbully victims were more inclined to report incidents to adults. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions targeting cyberbullying, with attention to gender-specific patterns and the importance of encouraging reporting behaviors among adolescents.

Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a pervasive problem that can take many different forms. Some common types of cyberbullying include:

Exclusion: This occurs when a cyberbully intentionally leaves someone out of an online group or message

thread, causing the victim to feel isolated and depressed.

Harassment: Harassment involves a cyberbully sending persistent and hurtful online messages to a victim, including threats.

Cyberstalking: A cyberbully may monitor a victim's online presence closely, making false accusations and threats against the victim and their loved ones. This can extend to the real world and become dangerous for the victim and their loved ones. Both cyberstalking and offline stalking are considered criminal offenses, and a victim can file a restraining order against their perpetrator. The perpetrator may also face probation and jail time.

Outing: This involves a cyberbully publicly revealing a person's gender identity or sexual orientation without their consent, with the intention of embarrassing or humiliating the victim.

Doxxing: Doxxing is a form of cyberbullying where personal information of an individual is maliciously shared online by a cyberbully to harass or intimidate the victim. This may include information such as the victim's home address, school, or social security number.

Fraping: Fraping is a form of cyberbullying in which a perpetrator gains unauthorized access to a victim's social media accounts and posts inappropriate content in their name, potentially causing reputational harm.

Trolling: Trolling involves the posting of derogatory comments about a victim online with the aim of causing harm, although not all trolling can be classified as cyberbullying.

Dissing; Dissing involves spreading cruel information about a victim, either publicly or privately, with the intention of damaging their reputation or relationships.

Flaming: Flaming involves sending or posting insults and profanity to a victim with the aim of provoking an online fight.

Denigration: Denigration involves disseminating false information about a victim in the form of cruel rumours and gossip.

Impersonation: Impersonation involves a cyberbully posing as the victim by posting comments in their name on social media or chat rooms, resulting in the victim facing backlash from others based on the bully's comments.

Trickery: Trickery involves a cyberbully gaining the trust of a victim by befriending them, only to publicly disclose the victim's personal information to embarrass, shame, or harm them.

Fake Profiles: Cyberbullies can establish fraudulent online profiles in the name of the victim. They can use these profiles to publish false information without the victim's consent.

Catfishing: Cyberbullies can create fake online profiles in the name of the victim, allowing them to disseminate false information without the victim's consent. This malicious behavior is known as catfishing. In this deceptive tactic, the cyberbully assumes a false online identity and impersonates someone else to manipulate the victim's emotions. By interacting with the victim using the false identity, the bully can establish an online relationship, leading the victim to reveal sensitive information. The cyberbully can then exploit this information to embarrass, damage the reputation, or expose the victim in a vulnerable position.

Cyber Bullying takes place through

As technology use among children and adolescents continues to increase, it becomes increasingly important to address the issue of cyberbullying. The sense of anonymity provided by screens has led many young people to believe they can post or say whatever they want without consequence. However, this lack of accountability has given rise to bullies who use social media to harass and intimidate their victims. The

proliferation of such platforms has only exacerbated the problem, giving bullies more opportunities to inflict harm.

It is concerning to note that many instances of cyberbullying go unreported. According to DoSomething.org, only one in ten children who experience cyberbullying will report it to a parent or other adult. It is essential for parents and educators to be aware of the various online venues where cyberbullying can occur.

E-mail: E-mail, typically associated with the professional realm, is also a popular means of communication among children and teenagers. According to the Pew Research Center, 64% of teenagers use email to connect with friends. While email can be a useful tool for staying in touch, it can also be used as a weapon by bullies. With the click of a button, bullies can send private information to large groups, including inappropriate images and revenge porn. Teens may also share passwords, allowing them to spread damaging information through drafts. Unfortunately, content filters are not always able to detect this type of cyberbullying. However, schools can take steps to protect their students by implementing computer word and phrase monitoring.

Texting: In today's digital era, teenagers are frequently inseparable from their smartphones, which can make it difficult to reach them. The widespread use of mobile phones and devices that can send text messages has given bullies the ability to harass their targets all the time. Furthermore, the availability of text messaging services on some computers adds to the problem, allowing teenagers to send and receive harmful messages even while they are doing their schoolwork.

Instant Messaging: While instant messaging platforms and apps are not as popular as texting, they still pose a significant threat to teenagers, particularly in the context of cyberbullying. Many teenagers mistakenly believe that these messages are anonymous and cannot be traced, making them an ideal medium for harassing victims.

Social Media: Social media sites are another common platform for cyberbullying. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 71% of teenagers have profiles on multiple social media sites, making them vulnerable to cyberbullying. Bullies can post embarrassing or personal photos, send direct messages, create harassing group chats, or post humiliating statuses directed at their targets. These platforms often have privacy settings that can mislead bullies into believing they can hide their actions from parents, teachers, and other adults. Therefore, it is essential to monitor teenagers' social media accounts to prevent cyberbullying and to identify any signs of harmful behaviours.

Gaming: Bullying is not limited to physical spaces; it also occurs in virtual environments such as gaming and search engines. In gaming, players who engage in violent video games are often targeted by bullies. Furthermore, game developers can also be victims of bullying by players.

Search Engine: Regarding search engines, people use a technique called "Google bombs" to manipulate internet users and perpetrate bullying. However, there are ways to counteract this form of bullying.

Cyber pornography

Cyber Pornography is defined as the use of cyberspace to produce, display, distribute, import, or publish sexually explicit or obscene materials, including those featuring children engaging in sexual activities with adults. Such behaviour is deemed criminal and can inflict harm on others. Pornographic content is available in various formats, such as images, short animated films, sound files, and stories.

Cyber pornography is particularly aimed at teenagers and children, with child pornography being a prevalent issue that includes pictures of children participating in social activities. Individuals utilize

cyberspace to distribute pornographic content, and cyber pornographers rely on these websites to view the material. The internet serves as the primary means of circulating child pornography, with both commercial and free websites offering access to pornographic content.

Effects of Pornography

The consumption of pornography has been found to have a negative impact on the behavior of individuals, particularly teenagers, who have easy access to it due to its free availability on the internet. This can result in an addiction to pornography, characterized by compulsive and continuous use of pornographic materials. This addiction can lead to serious physical, mental, and social issues, which have been recognized as "internet use disorder."

Some studies suggest a correlation between sexual violence and pornography addiction, as those with a violent nature tend to view violent pornography. However, some researchers argue that there is no connection between rapists and the content of pornography.

Pornographic actors are at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases due to their lack of condom use during filming.

The production of pornographic material often involves unstimulated sex, which is the portrayal of actual sex acts in a film, rather than actors simply miming or simulating sexual actions.

It is crucial to provide awareness and counselling sessions to children and teenagers about the implications of pornography, as they are highly susceptible to its influence. This can help to reduce the number of school-age juveniles who engage in pornography consumption.

Consequences of Cyberbullying

It is important to recognize that cyberbullying can have severe and lasting consequences for a person's mental and emotional well-being. Therefore, it is crucial to take proactive measures to prevent and address this issue. The constant stress and fear it causes can lead to problems with mood, energy levels, sleep, and appetite, and can make someone feel anxious, jumpy, or sad. For those who are already depressed or anxious, cyberbullying can exacerbate their condition. Cyberbullied students may also struggle to concentrate in school, which can negatively impact their academic performance.

It's not only the person being bullied who suffers consequences. Cyberbullies can face serious repercussions, including dismissal from sports teams or suspension from school. In some cases, cyberbullying may violate school codes or break anti-discrimination and sexual harassment laws, leading to legal trouble for the bully.

Victims of cyberbullying are more likely to engage in substance abuse, suffer from physical and emotional health issues, and have low self-esteem compared to their peers. They may also experience poor academic performance, and some may even avoid going to school altogether.

Strategies for Prevent Cyberbullying

To safeguard teenagers' growing online presence for school or college assignments, parents and teens must take necessary precautions while browsing the internet. Although there is no foolproof strategy to entirely eliminate the risk of children being bullied online, there are several cyberbullying safety tips that can significantly reduce the likelihood of it occurring. By implementing these tips, parents and educators can help protect children from cyberbullying as well as other malicious online activities, such as catfishing.

Use Strong Passwords and Different Ones for Each Account: Parents should teach their children the importance of using strong passwords when creating new accounts or logging in online. This can prevent cyberbullying and other malicious activities like catfishing. Creating strong passwords is one of the best ways to avoid cyberbullying. To ensure account security, parents should advise their children to use passwords that are difficult to guess and to create separate passwords for each account. This can help prevent unauthorized access to their accounts.

Adjust Privacy Settings: One of the most effective ways to prevent cyberbullying is to adjust privacy settings. Parents should ensure that all privacy settings and tools offered by the platform their child is using are activated. For example, Zoom, Google Meet, Twitter, online chat rooms, etc. They should also review each of their child's accounts and set privacy settings such as making profile photos private, preventing people from tagging, blocking requests from strangers, etc.

Avoid Sharing Personal Information: Teens often create accounts on different platforms for school or college projects. Parents should teach their children not to share personal information such as phone numbers, addresses, school or home locations, etc. They should explain to their children what information they can and cannot share online, especially if they have friends or followers. This is the best solution for preventing cyberbullying in children.

Location Sharing: Some smartphones allow users to share their location with friends, meaning others can track your current whereabouts. It's crucial for parents to educate their children on the potential risks and consequences of sharing their location with unknown individuals. Have an open discussion with your child to determine who they can safely share their location with.

Encourage Thoughtful Posting: Teenagers often share their activities online, including photos, movies, and outings. This information can be exploited by hackers and cyber attackers, as well as cyberbullies who may use it to target and harass teens. It's important to teach children how to protect themselves from cyberbullying and to think twice before posting anything online.

Review and Monitor Online Accounts: Parents should sit down with their children to review all of their online accounts and determine which posts need to be deleted or who is on their friend list. Teach them not to accept friend requests from strangers and to avoid connecting with them in any way.

Don't Engage with Cyberbullies: Advise your children not to respond to cyberbullies and to inform you or the appropriate authorities if they are being harassed. Encourage them not to argue or engage in any suspicious activity, and to capture and save any evidence of harassment to submit to the appropriate authorities. Reporting cyberbullying is crucial in addressing the issue.

Parental Supervision of Digital Media Use

As the amount of digital usage among children continues to grow, it can be challenging for parents to limit their children's internet usage in today's technological age. Nevertheless, it is essential for parents to take an active role in limiting their children's digital media consumption. According to Youn (2008), parental mediation is a form of socialization where parents, who act as primary socialization agents, shape their children's behaviours and attitudes to become more competent users of technology.

Parental Mediation Techniques
Restriction

Parents can restrict their children's digital usage by controlling their access to the internet. They can establish specific timing for internet use, which should only be allowed in designated areas. It is important for parents to set a limit on their own digital usage, as children often emulate their parents' behaviour.

Active or Instructive Meditation

This method involves the parent sitting near the child and discussing their online activities. The parent mediates the child's use of various sites and imposes restrictions on certain content.

Monitoring

This technique involves the parent monitoring the child's digital activities, including their search and activity history. The parent provides feedback on the good and bad sites and recommends appropriate usage time.

Distant Mediation

This technique includes "deference," which is when parents decide not to interfere with their children's autonomy, and "supervision," which involves allowing children to use digital technology independently but under close supervision.

These are the main methods used by parents to mediate their children's digital usage, and their approach may depend on their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about digital technology.

Conclusion

Cyberbullying is more prevalent than parents and educators typically acknowledge. Students frequently attempt to handle the situation on their own or disregard the bully. While this approach might prove effective in some cases, the impact of cyberbullying on mental health can be severe. To mitigate this issue, it's crucial to educate students about the lasting and public nature of online content. They must understand that once something is posted, it can never be entirely erased from the internet. However, with the support of parents and other trusted adults, teenagers can develop safe digital practices that they can carry with them into adulthood.

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