

# CYBERBULLYING IN CHILDREN: A SCHOOL BASED ANALYSIS

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## **Abstract**

***This study tries to understand the beliefs and opinions regarding cyberbullying among high school students. Data were collected from grade 8 and 9 students from a single school located at Trivandrum. Several themes have emerged from the analysis, which uncovers some important patterns. One major finding is that most of the students feel reluctant to report cyberbullying incidents to adults. Another major finding which needs more clarification in future studies is majority student population belief that the reason for cyberbullying is fun, which are discussed in depth.***

***Keyword: Cyberbullying, beliefs, mental health***

## **1.INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, technology has reformed our daily lives. Technology has created amazing ways where information can be at our fingertips which helps in the improvement of quicker ways to communicate. Now modern technology has had immense influence on the psycho-social realms of human beings.

Technology has changed human behaviour, our ways of functioning in society with both positive and negative consequences. It made everything possible from knowledge to entertainment. At the same time, many people find it difficult to survive without technology. Being overly connected to technology can be the source of various psychological issues. This brings new dimensions to the responsibilities as educators and mentors. There is no doubt that technologies are bringing more opportunities and at the same time requiring all of us to rethink the ethical use of technology in education sectors especially in schools. Internet access applications helps students to interact better at the same time put their safety and

psychological well-being at risk. The present study focuses on examining the negative use of technology, that is a new form of bullying called "cyberbullying" Cyberbullying is becoming a serious problem. Recent research literature has shown that a substantial number of students are victims of cyberbullying, (Moore et al, 2017). This study, therefore, explores student awareness and their response about cyberbullying.

**Cyberbullying** is when someone bully or harass others on the internet. "Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (Belsey, 2008). Bullying behaviour can include posting rumours, threats, sexual remarks, a victims' personal information, or pejorative labels (i.e. hate speech) etc. The anonymity nature of cyberbullying can easily make any child a cyberbully (Poland, 2010). Cyberbullying can take many forms such as;

**Harassment:** Involves the bully sending offensive and malicious messages to an individual or a group and is often repeated multiple times.

**Flaming:** Is similar to harassment, but it refers to an online fight exchanged via emails, instant messaging or chat rooms. It is a type of public bullying that often directs harsh languages, or images to a specific person.

**Exclusion:** Is the act of intentionally singling out and leaving a person out from an online group such as chats and sites. The group then subsequently leave malicious comments and harass the one they singled out.

**Outing/Doxing:** Is when a bully shares personal and private information, pictures, or videos about someone

publicly. A person is "outed" when his information has been disseminated throughout the internet.

**Masquerading:** Is the situation where a bully creates a fake identity to harass someone anonymously. In addition to creating a fake identity, the bully can impersonate someone else to send malicious messages to the victim.

**Cyberstalking:** Is a form of cyberbullying which can extend to threats of physical harm. It can include monitoring, false accusations, threats, and often accompanied by offline stalking.

Social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969) proposes that lack of social bonds or self-control increases criminal involvement. According to Gilbert and Mc Guire (1998) work on aggressive and attractive strategies for gaining social rank fits well in this context. According to them in order to maintain one's social rank, individual use either attractive strategies (showing talent and competence) or aggressive strategies (authoritarianism, coercion or threats) in order to make others fearful, inhibited or submissive.

Price and Dalgleish's research (2010) on impact of cyberbullying on victims shows self-esteem, self-evaluation, and friendship as the most common impacts in victims. Results also revealed negative impacts on school grades, school attendance, and on family relationships. Many of the respondents stated a wide impact on emotional behaviour (extreme sadness, frustration, embarrassment, fear and thinking of suicide and self-harmed behaviour) due to cyberbullying.

A survey was conducted by Beran and Li in 2005, involving 432 (grade 7 to 9) students from nine junior high schools from middle-class, in Canada showed that more than two thirds of students have heard of cyberbullying incidents and about one quarter have been cyberbullied. Another study of 177 seventh-grade students in Canada showed a similar pattern. Results showed that almost 15% of the students admitted that they cyberbullied others. A theme that emerged was the anonymity associated with this type of behaviour in that over 40% of the cyber victims had no idea who the bullies were (Li, 2005). Several studies conducted in the United States, Great Britain, and other countries showed the similar pattern in cyberbullying (Kennedy, 2005).

When gender differences were observed, research demonstrated that males and females showed different patterns in bullying-related behaviours (Carbone, Esbensen & Brick, 2010). It was observed that females might prefer to use electronic communication media such as chat rooms and e-mail to bully others (Nelson, 2003; Thorp, 2004).

Some studies on traditional bullying identified a victim-bully cycle in school (Ma, 2001; Besag, 1989). Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988) found that students who are physically stronger are less likely to be either victims or bullies. The findings of a recent Canadian study of 264 middle-school students revealed a bullying-cyberbullying-victim cycle (Li, 2006). That is, bullying, cyberbullying, and victimization are closely related. A research study showed that about half the bullies were also cyberbullies. Similarly, over half the victims were involved in cyberbullying, either as cyberbullies or as victims.

Another study by Patchin & Hinduja (2006) conducted an online survey involving 384 respondents who were under 18 years of age, showed that various forms of bullying occurred online, including being ignored, disrespected, called names, threatened, picked on, made fun of, and having rumours spread about them.

Thompson et al. (2008) studied the incidence of cyberbullying among adolescents. The study shows important relationships not only between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, but also between the cyberbullying participant role and individual levels of self-esteem and loneliness. According to them text messaging over mobile phones was the most common medium used for cyberbullying.

Research studies have indicated that cyberbullying is becoming a major issue in schools and has various negative effects. It is not clear how students' beliefs and opinions affect their behaviours online, whether as a cyberbully, a cybervictim, or a bystander. This study, therefore, examines student opinions and beliefs in relation to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon; limited literature is available in this field. This study was built on the survey created by the author. In addition, the theoretical framework and the existing literature guided the development of this research.

## 2. PROCEDURE

Random selection of individual students was preferred. A total of 200 samples were obtained from grade eight and nine. After obtaining the informed consent, the cyberbullying student survey was administered. Quantitative analysis of the questionnaires was used to examine students' behaviours and beliefs about cyberbullying.

### 3. RESULTS

The first few questions were directed to know about the students' access of internet, how much time they are active in social media sites, which social media site they are using the most, and which part of the day they are finding out time for their internet related activities.

The results showed that 96% students have internet connection at home. 14.4% students are using various social media sites for more than three hours. Most of the students prefer evening time (70%) for internet access. Among the various social media sites Facebook seemed to be the most accessed application.

Participants were asked about the form of cyberbullying that is taking place. In their awareness, it comes as a form of hurtful statements or threats (24.4%). 20.9% respondents reported as cyberbullying in the form of hacking and 14.9% reported as in the form of rumours and or posting offensive pictures.

The third and fourth research questions were hypothetical questions. "If you were cyberbullied, to whom you would report". 59.2% students responded as they would report to their parents. Over 23.4% reported that they will be silent. Another 12.9% reported that they will inform their close friends and only 0.4% reported that they will inform their teachers.

Fourth hypothetical question was "what can be the reason that students are reluctant to report as they are cyberbullying victim".

The students' responses showed that over 39.8% students believe that if they would inform about cyberbullying parents will restrict their access. 18.4% thought that no one would really understand their problems and concerns. Nearly 17.9% belief that the cyberbullying would get back. Almost 12.4% students believe that they will get into trouble if they would disclose the matter to anyone and another 9% strongly belief that they can handle the situation without any external assistance. About 2% belief that no one can do anything against this.

The fifth research question was related to "what can be the reason for cyberbullying"? The results demonstrated that over 46.8% students thought the cyberbullies did it for fun. Close to 32% belief that they were angry or jealous. Nearly 11% attributed feelings of insecurity can be a reason for cyberbullying and almost 10% attributed other reasons such as bored or having interpersonal relationship issues.

The last question concerned student's opinion about the ways to stop cyberbullying. Close to 50% respondent suggested to make the cyberbullying legalised. Over 19.4% reported need for creating awareness among student community regarding the impact of cyberbullying. 15.9% responded to have the need for educating parents and about 12.4% reported enforcing polices in school sectors.

### 4. DISCUSSION

The present study focused on the opinion and beliefs about cyberbullying. Several aspects have emerged that enable us to know the facts related to cyberbullying. Why would many of the respondents choose to be silent about cyberbullying. As mentioned above, highest proportion of students believe that parents will restrict their access to internet and that they would overreact or would not understand this issue at all. Another important reason for not reporting is the fear that the cyberbully could get back and escalate the problem. The anonymity nature of technology works better for cyberbullies. This reveals why the students were apprehensive (get into trouble/ no one would understand). Only a sizable number of students responded as they will inform their teachers about cyberbullying. One reason for this might be that cyberbullying is relatively new phenomenon and most schools have no idea regarding the implementation of intervention (Trolley, Hanel & Shield, 2006).

Another concern raised with respect to restricting cyberbullying is creating awareness and provide information about the impact of cyberbullying. Which shed light on the fact that schools should educate students and parents about cyberbullying and its impacts. At the basic level the adults including teachers and parents need to be aware of this new technology to know how the students are interacting through technology and how these negative phenomena happen in the web world. Strategies to stop

cyberbullying issues need to be part of regular curriculum where they can offer opportunities for students to develop skills, such as dealing with emotional issues, better decision-making skills and skills for developing effective interpersonal relationships. When the focus shifted to solution for cyberbullying the majority were stressing the need for enforcing policies in this area. Especially enforcing Anti-cyberbullying laws.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study can aid the school community to enforce policies related to cyberbullying. The opinions and beliefs of school children about cyberbullying can be an aid for mental health service providers in their clinical practices especially when it comes to dealing with adolescent issues. In depth understanding of what contributes to the cyberbullying helps educators to find out resources to make progress in this area.

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**Table 1 Student opinion and Belief about cyberbullying**

Construct	n	%
Form of cyberbullying (N=200)		
Hurtful statement	49	24.4
Rumours	30	14.9
Threats	49	24.4
Hacking	42	20.9
Posting pictures	30	14.9
Reporting to whom (N=200)		
Teacher	8	4
Parent	119	59.2
Friend	261	12.9
Be silent	47	23.4
Reluctant to report (N=200)		
No one would understand	37	18.4
Can't do anything	4	2.0
Get into trouble	251	2.4
Cyberbully will get back	36	17.9
Parents will restrict the access	80	39.8
I can deal with it	18	9.0
Reason for cyberbullying (N=200)		
Fun	94	46.8
Insecure	22	10.9
Angry	64	31.8
Other reasons (bored/relationship issues)	20	10
Ways to stop cyberbullying (N=200)		
Make it illegal	99	49.3
Enforce policies	25	12.4
Educate parents	32	15.9
Providing information	39	19.4
Other means	5	2.5