Cyberbullying As A Threat In The Digital Society: Effects And Suggestions

Abstract: Although the Internet, cellphones, artificial intelligence, and other forms of electronic communication are becoming more useful, they are also exposing young people to these kinds of connections, which endangers their physical and mental health. "Cyberbullying, a new potential threat in the digital society, and there is nothing anyone can do to stop it" — attitudes on this are rather divided. It is imperative that everyone stays abreast of technology developments and participates actively in online forums that are prone to bullying. Most schools take bullying very seriously and work to eliminate it. The majority of educational institutions have anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies in place via their student conduct offices or disciplinary procedures. The research paper examines the effects of cyberbullying on society at large while developing an understanding of the concepts of cyberbullying. The research paper will conclude by giving suggestions to avoid the possible threat of cyberbullying.

Keywords: - Cyberbullying, Digital Society, Information Technology.

Introduction

"Cyberbullying, a new potential threat in the digital society, and there is nothing anyone can do to stop it"- there is a sort of mixed feeling regarding this. Technology is advancing at an extraordinary rate compared to ever before, affecting our way of interaction with others and the rest of the world, resulting in the erosion of our responsibilities and humanistic values.[1] Although the Internet, cellphones, artificial intelligence, and other forms of electronic communication are becoming more useful, they are also exposing young people to these kinds of connections, which endangers their physical and mental health. Furthermore, India lacks a specific legislation that pertains to cyberbullying; however, provisions in extant laws may be applicable to a variety of forms of abuse, particularly those outlined in the Information Technology Act of 2000,[2] which plays a significant role among other existing laws. Involving the whole community, including parents and educators, is ultimately the most effective way to stop cyberbullying. It may be prevented by administrators, parents, teachers, and students. Every person has to keep up with the latest developments

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[1] R. M Kowalski, S.P. Limbe., et.al., *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd edn., 2012).
[2] Information Technology Act, 2002 (Act 21 of 2000), s. 67.

in technology and participate actively in online forums where bullying is likely to happen. In most schools, bullying is addressed and handled seriously. The majority of colleges and universities have policies against bullying and harassment in addition to disciplinary procedures or student conduct offices.

THIS PAPER AIMS TO:

(1) Conceptualize the Meaning and forms of Cyberbullying

(2) Evaluate the effects of Cyberbullying on the society

(3) Analyse Technological Advancement, Social Media, and Increasing Cases of Abuse

(4) Give suggestions to minimise the chances of cyberbullying

Meaning and Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is when someone intentionally and persistently uses technology, including mobile phones and the internet, to harass or hurt someone else. In contrast to conventional bullying, it may occur at anytime and anyplace, and the offender is often anonymous. Destructive activity might flourish because of the anonymity and absence of immediate consequences. Cyberbullying may take many different forms. Researchers divided seventh and eighth graders into four groups: 74% were neither a victim nor a bully, 5% were victims exclusively, 6% were bullies only, and 15% were both.[3]

The most common forms of cyberbullying include:

- **Harassment**: Sending someone cruel, offensive, and derogatory texts on a regular basis.

- **Trickery**: deceiving someone into disclosing private or humiliating information or pictures, then posting them online

- **Elimination**: Deliberately and cruelly leaving someone out of an online group.

- **Cyberstalking**: Persistent, severe harassment and defamation that involves threats or instils a great deal of fear

- **Flaming**: Online altercations in which unpleasant, obscene, and furious language is used in electronic messaging

- **Impersonation**: Posing online as someone else in order to transmit or upload something that puts that person in risk, causes them to go into difficulty, or harms their reputation

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[3] Sameer Hinduja, J.W. Patchin, et.al., *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying* (Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, California, 2nd ed., 2015).

Effects of Cyberbullying:

1. Sociological and Anthropological Effects:

Cyberbullying has a substantial sociological impact, affecting social structures and group dynamics.[4]. From a sociological perspective, cyberbullying can be understood as a form of deviant behaviour that is often minimized or normalized within a society. This is particularly true in digital settings where the lack of direct, in-person engagement and supervision will lead to a collapse of social norms.

Cyberbullying creates a situation where the norms for healthy online interactions are violated, which disrupts a victim's emotional balance and can lead to feelings of uncertainty, stress, and identity crises. The victim's alienation and loss of direction due to online bullying can worsen their psychological state, increasing the risk of extreme actions like suicide. In some cases, cyberbullying might even be seen as a method of social control, used to implement group standards or emphasize authority. Karl Marx's conflict theory offers another lens through which to view cyberbullying, suggesting it's a result of social disparity. Those with more power may use cyberbullying to exploit those who are less privileged, thereby worsening social tensions. In this context, cyberbullying becomes a tool for individuals to assert their superiority and maintain their place in a social hierarchy.

Anthropological perspectives suggest that cyberbullying is not just a result of personal deviance but also replicates broader cultural and societal changes brought about by technology. It can be seen as a mirror of shifting power dynamics and social hierarchies within digital networks. In societies where public reputation and social status are highly valued, such as Indonesia, cyberbullying may be a way to protect one's social standing or retaliate against perceived insults.

The societal effects of cyberbullying are significant, even if it's sometimes tolerated. It can lead to the victim losing social capital and damaging their reputation as their peers view them differently. It can also create divisions within social groups as bystanders are forced to choose sides, which undermines social trust and cohesiveness. The contrast between the psychological harm to the individual and society's sometimes-tolerant view of the behaviour highlights the complex nature of cyberbullying as both a personal and cultural phenomenon.

2. Psychological Effects

Cyberbullying has profound and far-reaching **psychological effects**, which are considered a major departure from normal behaviour because they directly compromise a victim's mental well-being, emotional stability, and self-esteem. Victims often experience long-lasting mental health issues such as **"anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem"**. In some severe cases, it can even lead to **suicidal thoughts and attempts**. A study found that one in five children who were cyberbullied also considered suicide as a result of their victimization.

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[4] Nancy E. Willard, *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press, Champaign, Illinois, USA, 2007).

Cyberbullying can lead to a variety of negative outcomes that mimic those of traditional bullying. Victims may suffer from stress, anxiety, and social dissatisfaction, as well as a negative attitude toward school. The constant burden of dealing with cyberbullying can steal a person's feelings of happiness and joy, increasing feelings of loneliness and anxiety. This psychological distress can manifest in physical symptoms like headaches, sleep problems, and gastrointestinal issues.

The experience can be so overwhelming that children may struggle to focus on their schoolwork or become afraid to attend school altogether. In one study, 83.3% of pre-service teachers believed that students who experience cyberbullying find it harder to concentrate on schoolwork, and 86.7% felt that their academic grades suffer as a result. In fact, some children may even skip class or act out in ways that lead to suspension.

A key psychological concept in understanding these effects is the **self-concept**, which is a person's view and evaluation of themselves. Negative comments can severely damage a person's self-concept, making them feel inadequate or unworthy. This is illustrated in the case of Nana, a content creator who received negative comments about her physical appearance. She initially tried to ignore them, but they led her to feel less confident, anxious, and unworthy of being a creator. However, when she received positive support from her friends, it helped to improve her self-concept and increased her self-confidence. This highlights the critical role of support systems in mitigating the psychological damage of cyberbullying.

Another important concept is **self-actualization**, a continuous process of becoming one's true self and developing one's full potential. As seen in the case of a girl named Sita, she became depressed and stressed by negative comments, which hampered her process of self-actualization. Without a strong support system, the negative effects of cyberbullying can become a significant obstacle to a person's personal growth and fulfilment.

Financial Effects:

Cyberbullying can lead to significant financial consequences for both individuals and organizations. Victims often face mental health challenges that require professional support, such as therapy or counselling, resulting in medical expenses. In some cases, the emotional distress may cause students to miss school or employees to take time off work, leading to lost income or educational setbacks. For schools and workplaces, dealing with cyberbullying can involve legal fees, damage control efforts, and the cost of implementing preventive measures like training programs or digital monitoring tools. Additionally, decreased productivity and increased staff turnover caused by a hostile environment can further add to the financial strain. Overall, the financial impact of cyberbullying extends beyond the personal level, affecting institutions and communities as well.

Technological Advancement, Social Media, and Increasing Cases of Abuse

The rapid advancement of technology has profoundly changed how people interact, offering conveniences but also introducing new risks to safety and emotional well-being. The 21st century has seen the rise of

"digital natives," [5]People who are accustomed to being seen on an unimaginable scale compared to previous generations, thanks to the omnipresence of technology like Instant Messaging, text messaging, and social media platforms like Myspace and Facebook. New worries about student and staff safety have arisen as a result of this ubiquitous connectivity to people all over the world.

When it comes to nonviolent bullying tactics like name-calling, the internet and other digital gadgets work well. While many children were not involved, one in five had experienced cyberbullying in a 2009 survey of seventh and eighth graders as a whole.[6] Additionally, 20% admitted to engaging in cyberbullying. Both bullies and bullied-by-standers claimed that their parents were unaware of how much time they spent on the internet and were reluctant to disclose the bullying to authorities. When compared to those who used the internet less often, those who used it more frequently were more likely to be the bully and the victim.

Social media platforms are the most common venue for cyberbullying. They provide an environment where destructive behaviour can flourish due to anonymity and a lack of immediate consequences. For instance, a person can create a new identity and bully others without having to be physically stronger than their victim. Insults that were once whispered behind people's backs are now posted for everyone to read.

The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened this problem, as most social interaction moved online. Teenagers and young adults spent more time on digital platforms for education, entertainment, and communication, which created more opportunities for cyberbullying. In fact, India ranks second in the world for daily internet usage, and cybercrimes are on the rise along with the growing cyber network. This easy accessibility to social media allows people to threaten, extort, and intimidate others online while remaining anonymous.

Another form of technology-related abuse is sexting, which is the act of sending or transmitting nude, sexually suggestive, or explicit images on a cell phone or online. Males are more likely to have received such photos, while females are more likely to have sent them. Almost one in five individuals who receive text messages forward them to another individual, and over half (61%) of those who send intimate photographs of themselves have been compelled to do so at least once. In the instance of an 18-year-old girl who committed suicide after her ex-boyfriend widely distributed a nude photo she had sent to him, the consequences of forwarded sexting can be tragic.

Technological advancements and the rise of social media have significantly transformed the way we communicate, learn, and interact. While these innovations have brought many benefits, such as global connectivity and access to information, they have also contributed to a disturbing increase in various forms of abuse. Cyberbullying, online harassment, child exploitation, revenge porn, and the spread of misinformation have become alarmingly common, often causing severe emotional and psychological harm. The anonymity and reach that technology provides can empower harmful behavior, making it easier for abusers to target individuals without consequence. As screen time increases and digital spaces grow, the

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[5] *Supra* note 4.

[6] Amanda Lenhart., *Teens and Sexting* (Pew Research Center, Washington D.C., 2009).

lack of regulation, weak enforcement of platform policies, and algorithms that favor engagement over safety have only made matters worse. To address this growing issue, there is a need for stronger laws, better moderation systems, digital literacy education, and more support for victims. As we continue to innovate, we must also ensure that technology is used responsibly and that online spaces are safe, respectful, and inclusive for everyone.

Possible Threats

The anonymity of the internet, coupled with the rapid spread of information, has created a new landscape of threats and dangers. These can extend far beyond emotional harm and into areas like financial fraud and identity theft.

Financial Scams

The digital age has made online activities, such as sharing private data and images, a common practice. However, this also puts people at serious risk of cybercrimes, including identity theft, cyberbullying, and stalking. The ease with which individuals can access personal information and the anonymity the internet provides create a ripe environment for malicious intent. A cyberbully may engage in defamation, which is the act of harming someone's reputation by spreading false information about them. This can have financial consequences, such as damaging a person's professional reputation or causing them to lose a job.

Threat of AI and Identity Theft

The internet is a double-edged sword, with both hazards and potential, and the constant increase in cyberbullying cases is a prime example of this. With the rise of artificial intelligence, the threat of identity theft has become even more sophisticated. Cyberbullies can use AI-powered tools to impersonate a victim, creating fake social media accounts, emails, or even deepfake videos that can cause significant harm. The ability to assume a false identity and spread rumours to a wide audience is a key feature of cyberbullying. This is particularly dangerous as it can lead to privacy violations, cyberbullying, and physical harm, and it exacerbates an unhealthy culture of online judgment.

The lack of legal protection and the difficulty in investigating and punishing cyber offenders are the main obstacles in combating these crimes. Although some countries, including India, don't have specific cyberbullying laws, they often rely on existing laws against harassment and other crimes to prosecute offenders.

For example, Section 67 of India's Information Technology Act imposes penalties for the publication or transmission of indecent material in electronic form, a provision that could be employed in certain cyberbullying cases.

A national initiative to resolve digital exploitation has been initiated by the media and other organisations. This encompasses initiatives such as MTV's "A Thin Line," which are designed to enable young individuals to recognise, address, and prevent the dissemination of digital abuse. Parents and educators are essential

in assisting young individuals in comprehending the repercussions.[7] Of ill-advised choices made in an era of instantaneous global dissemination of knowledge. To counteract these dangers, it is important to teach young people how to behave appropriately online and the consequences of inappropriate use, such as losing friends or getting in trouble with the law.

Suggestions

The psychological and social effects of cyberbullying are profound. Victims often experience a range of negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social dissatisfaction. In severe cases, cyberbullying has been linked to substance abuse, academic problems, and even suicidal thoughts. From a psychological perspective, cyberbullying is considered deviant because it directly compromises a victim's mental and emotional well-being. Sociologically, the issue is complex; while its effects on individuals are clearly harmful, some societies may normalize or tolerate it in digital spaces where traditional social norms are less defined. This is often explained through concepts like anomie, which describes a state where social norms become unclear due to rapid changes, like the rise of social media. The lack of direct adult supervision online and the perceived "less real" nature of online interactions in some cultures allow this harmful behaviour to persist.

- **Do not respond to Cyberbullying messages.** Responding may worsen the situation.
- **Retain evidence:** Document dates, times, and details of each incident. Save and print screenshots, emails, chat logs, and messages.
- **Block the person immediately:** Prevent further contact by using platform tools to block or silence the cyberbully.
- **Report the abuse to the concerned bodies:** Use built-in reporting features on social media, games, or messaging apps.
- **Inform a trusted adult:** Tell a parent, teacher, school counselor, or workplace supervisor if the bullying affects your well-being.
- **Contact relevant authorities if necessary:** Report to police or legal authorities if the messages include threats, stalking, or harassment.
- **Adjust your confidentiality:** Limit who can contact or view your profile to reduce vulnerability.
- **Seek emotional support:** Talk to friends, family, or a mental health professional to cope with the impact.
- **Educate yourself and others:** Learn about cyberbullying and how to stay safe online. Encourage respectful online behavior.

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[7] UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health* (UNICEF, New York, 2021).

Conclusion:

Cyberbullying is a growing concern in the digital age, with a variety of forms and severe consequences for its victims. It is defined as using technology to deliberately and repeatedly harass or harm another person. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is characterized by its anonymity and accessibility, allowing it to occur at any time and in any location where there is an internet connection. The rise of social media and other communication technologies has made cyberbullying a global issue, affecting individuals of all ages but disproportionately impacting teenagers.

In conclusion, cyberbullying is a growing problem that is often underestimated due to a lack of awareness and inadequate support systems. Enforcing strict rules, fostering supportive communities, and raising awareness can all help reduce its prevalence. As technology continues to evolve, society should adapt by creating new strategies to protect individuals and ensure their well-being in both the digital and physical worlds.

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