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Cyberbullying: Harmful Impact of Technology

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Abstract

Cyber bullying represents one of the adverse consequences of technology use, which has become a topic of increasing societal concern. The issue of cyber-bullying often tops the agenda of government officials, educators, parents and legal practitioners. The rapid advancement of cellular phones and Internet technologies has opened up new and infinite spaces that young people can explore with fewer restrictions. The possibilities for increasing communication represent a world of freedom and excitement, where nothing is impossible and not far from where everyone clicks the mouse. Digital technologies save time and bring instant happiness. If we are to believe the above media headlines, ironically, the issue of cyber-bullying has become a battle of sorts in cyberspace. Hence, this article aims to highlight the changing trend of modern crime, which affects the society at large. Analytical methodology is adopted to scrutinize the statistical information provided by the official reports and web resources.

Key words: Social media, Cyber bullying, Technology, Digital crime.

INTRODUCTION

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content, such as personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Many of today's new technologies are designed to be convenient to interact with each other. One of the most popular ways to meet others online is instant messaging, chat rooms, Facebook and other websites specifically designed to interact with people who share similar interests. On the one hand, technologies have made communication much easier.

Cyber bullying refers to bullying or harassment of any kind inflicted through electronic or communication devices such as computers, mobile phones, laptops, and usually involves text messages, phone calls, e-mails, instant messengers, social media platforms, or chat rooms. It ranges from the posting of hurtful words, derogatory comments and fake information on public forums or blogs to threats to rape or kill. The most frequently used definition of cyberbullying is 'an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and overtime against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. A more comprehensive, though shorter, definition is presented by Nancy Willard, Director for the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, who describes cyber-bullying as speech that is 'defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments' (Willard, 2003, p. 66.) Other terms for Cyber bullying are 'electronic bullying', 'e-bullying', 'SMS bullying', 'mobile bullying', 'online bullying', 'digital bullying', or 'Internet bullying'...

TYPES OF CYBER BULLYING

In the age of the internet, numerous contents are shared or posted by numerous individuals. personal content as well as any negative, mean, or threat content – creates a kind of permanent record of the views they possess, their activities, and their behavior. Based on the nature of Cyber bullying, it is broadly classified into the following terms:

- **Persistent Cyber bullying:** This kind of Cyber bullying exists all the time based on the fact that social media or messaging platforms are easily accessible to all. A person experiencing cyberbullying in this way hardly finds little relief from it due to its permanent nature. The constant bullying puts the victim on depression.
- **Permanent Cyber bullying:** This kind of Cyber bullying takes place online and leaves a permanent digital footprint, which if not reported never gets deleted, thus staying in the online platform forever. A permanent cyberbully post can haunt a victim for a lifetime affecting his future as well as the present.
- **Hard to notice:** Such type of bullying doesn't gain much attention. Most people including parents and teachers are not aware of such a kind of cyber bully thereby failing to recognize it. The person bullying the victim gets an added advantage in such a case.

- **Cyber stalking:** It includes monitoring, making false accusations, threats along offline stalking. It is regarded as a serious form of Cyber bullying. It might extend to physical threats to the targeted victim.
- **Trickery:** It is a kind of cyber bully where the bully gain trust of the victim by promising false security and then the bully takes disadvantage of the trust and leaks private information to the third party.
- **Trolling:** Here, the bully intentionally posts offensive posts or comments online to harass the victim. The bully generally does not have any personal relationship with the victim but intends to harm the victim mentally.
- **Harassment:** Occurs when threatening messages are repeated day and night. Some bullies post these threatening messages on public forums for all to see the threats. Chat rooms and bulletin boards are often used.
- **Impersonation, Masquerading, or Posing:** To be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships. These are elaborate forms of Cyber bullying in which the bullier pretends to be someone else and uses someone else's e-mail or mobile phone.

Cyber Bullying scenario in India

In the Indian context, year by year, with increasing technology, cheap internet plans and the intense pursuit of the dream of a “digital India” nowadays, most people have internet access through computers, tablets or mostly mobile devices. The threat of cyber bullying is dangerous and its evaluation and prevention is even more urgent. The most vulnerable in this population are our children and teenagers, India ranks third in cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is the practice of using electronic technology to harass, threaten, intimidate, humiliate, and target victims. Cyber bullying is basically an electronic version of intimidation.

Cyber bullying is that which takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyber bullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyber bullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. The most common places where cyber bullying occurs are Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok. Text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices, instant messaging, direct messaging and online chatting over the internet. The content an individual shares online – both their personal content as well as any negative, mean or hurtful content – creates a kind of permanent public record of their views, activities, and behaviour. Cyber bullying can harm the online reputations of everyone involved – not just the person being bullied, but those doing the bullying or participating in it. What is clear is that cyber bullying can be extremely harmful. Numerous cases of cyber bullying in recent years have revealed the painful, insidious nature of cyber bullying and the disastrous effects it has had on our children including depression, isolation, and, in worst cases, suicide.

The increasing access to affordable data service has given rise to these faceless evil worldwide - young children, in particular teenagers, being the most vulnerable victims. One in every three young people has reported to be a victim of cyberbullying, according to a survey conducted by UNICEF in as many as 30 countries. The poll found that nearly one in five parents worldwide said their child had experienced cyber bullying at least once. And, according to a majority of respondents, social networks including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter are the most commonplace sites on which cyber bullying occurs. The problem is particularly bad in India which had the highest rate of parents confirming instances of cyber bullying. A total of 37% of parents across India said their child was bullied online, 14% among them said the bullying occurred on a regular basis. Studies show cyberbullying can cause profound harm as it can quickly reach a wide audience, and can remain accessible online indefinitely, virtually following its victims online for life.

Anti-Cyber Bullying Laws in India

Cyber bullying in India has claimed more innocent lives than in any other Asian country. However, it is shocking that there are no special Anti-Cyber Bullying Laws in India yet. Various provisions of the pre-existing rules, regulations and acts cover the various forms of cyber bullying. The Indian Penal Code of 1860, under various sections clearly indicates the nature of offence under cyber-crime: Sec.503 of (IPC) - sending threatening messages through email; Sec.509 of the IPC that deals with Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman; Sec.499 of the IPC that deals with Sending defamatory messages through email; Sec.500 of the IPC that deals with Email Abuse. Later the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 were amended by the IT Act of 2000 to keep in tune with the technological changes that were rising rapidly.

Henceforth, cyber laws are contained in the Information Technology Act, 2000 ("IT Act") which came into force on October 17, 2000. The main purpose of the Act is to provide legal recognition to electronic commerce and to facilitate filing of electronic records with the Government. The key provisions of the Information Technology Act are: Sec.66A - sending offensive messages through communication services; Sec.66D - cheating by personation by using the computer resource; Sec.66E - violation of privacy; Sec.67B - Punishment for publishing or transmitting of material depicting children in any sexually explicit act, etc. in electronic form; Sec.72 - breach of confidentiality and privacy.

Examining the laws prevalent to address this rampantly increasing crime of cyber-bullying, there exists a dire need to have a ‘specific legislation’ in place. In this regard, it is relevant to mention that the Ministry of Human Resources, having realised the gravity of cyber-bullying, has directed all schools and colleges to form Anti-Ragging Committees. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has also issued special regulations called the ‘UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions 2009’. Even the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) has brought about a detailed set of guidelines defining the role of teachers, parents, and students in the ethical use of the Internet. The gist of the guidelines states that students are required to “report online bullying immediately” to teachers, parents, or someone they trust. Further, the guidelines also stipulate that educational institutions are to use built-in filters to check and prevent harassment by cyber-bullies.

We also have the latest legislation “The Protection of Children from Sexual Offence Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) which protects children below the age of 18 years from any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault and pornography which would include any form of sexual- cyber bullying which would be punishable under the provisions of this Act. Despite all the existing rules and regulations, it is disheartening to note the statistical survey of Cyber bullying in India.

SURVEY ON CYBER BULLYING

- According to Micro-Soft’s ‘Global Youth Online Behaviour Survey’ in 2012, covering more than 7,600 children across 25 countries aged between 8 and 17, India ranked third in the number of cyber bullying cases (53%) Around 9.2% of 630 adolescents surveyed in Delhi-National Capital Region had experienced cyber bullying and half of them had not reported it to teachers, guardians or the social media companies concerned, a recent study by Child Rights and You (CRY), a non-governmental organisation, found.
- The Ipsos report in November 2014 found that India was the highest in the number of child cyber bullying cases (32%) among 24 countries.
- As per a 2016 estimate by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), globally, one in three internet users is a child whereas, in India, the recent ‘India Internet Report 2019’ suggests that two in three internet users are between 12 and 29 years of age. The young age of this group of internet users often falls prey to online bullies due to their psychological makeup. This has resulted in a spike in cyber bullying and harassment cases. As a matter of fact, in one year alone (2017-2018), cyber bullying of Indian women and teenagers rose by 36%.
- The statistics of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that the cases of cyber stalking or bullying of women or children increased by 36% from 542 in 2017 to 739 in 2018, but the conviction rate for cyber stalking or bullying of women and children fell 15 percentage points from 40% in 2017 to 25% in 2018. Further, NCRB also shows that 44,546 cases of cyber-crimes were registered in 2019 as compared to 28,248 in 2018. This reveals the fact that India has recorded a massive increase of 63.5% in cybercrime cases in the year 2019.
- As the NCRB 2020 data reveals, there is a sharp rise (over 400 per cent) in cybercrimes (registered under the Information Technology Act) committed against children in comparison to the last year. In 2019, 164 cases of cyber-crimes against children were reported while in 2018, 117 cases of cyber-crimes were committed against children and 79 such cases were registered in 2017. Even though the number of cyber-crime cases committed against children in 2020 remains small, its rise from 2019 is alarming.
- The ‘Online Study and Internet Addiction’, released on February 18, 2020 concluded that vulnerability rose with internet use. 22.4% of respondents (aged 13-18 years) who used the internet for longer than three hours a day were vulnerable to online bullying, while up to 28% of respondents who used the internet for more than four hours a day faced cyber-bullying.

Effects of cyber bullying

Exposure to cyber bullying can have many adverse effects on children and youth. Issues related to concentration, behaviour and emotionality can occur among victims of cyber bullying. If we talk about emotional and physical effects, they experience trust issues and get caught in the wrong habits like alcohol, drugs, or smoking at a very early age. It also has long-term effects for example – chronic fatigue, insomnia, and poor performance at work. The long-term effects of cyber bullying can also be life-threatening. As per the cyber bullying, there are 20% of victims who commit suicide. Some of the common effects are:

- Diminishing self-esteem.
- Tendency to withdraw from those around and spend time alone.
- Reluctance to allow parents or family members to use their phones or computers.
- Sudden loss of weight or changes in appearance.
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Feeling unsafe, exposed and humiliated.
- Coming up with excuses to stay away from school.
- Injury marks on the skin indicating self-harm
- Change in personality, with increased bouts of anger, depression and crying spells.
- A decline in performance in academics, sports, and extra-curricular activities

Suggestions

Parents, children and administrators can take steps to stop cyber bullying before it starts or becomes worse. Few suggestions are given here to prevent cyber bullying.

- Discuss the serious issue of cyber bullying with your children before it occurs,
- Stress the importance of not giving out personal information such as name, address, phone number, pictures, e-mail address and password.
- Convince your children not to open any messages from people they do not know.
- Urge your children to come to you if they receive any messages that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Get the facts but do not respond emotionally.
- Stress that under no circumstances not to respond to bullying messages online.
- Do not delete bullying messages-save them for evidence.
- Print out offending messages.
- Computer should be in an open, central location.
- Monitor your child/children's computer time.
- Set up a Google alert for your child's name.

Besides the above, learn how to report abuses to social networking sites and Internet service providers. Many networks have security officers and try to get items down in less than twenty-four hours. On Facebook, go to "Report/Block This Person" or "Remove from Friends," or go to "Report Page." For Myspace, contact "Myspace" on the bottom of any page, 80 to "Spam," and then click on "Require approval before comments are posted." Formspring advises users not to answer a mean comment and then it won't be seen by anyone. Report harassment by clicking "Help" on any page, or submit a complaint. There are several software programs and online services that can help parents detect and address bullying. SafetyWeb and SocialShield are two of the newer services available for a monthly fee. If your child receives threats of harm, contact the police resource officer who is a school-based police officer. You will need evidence that may be saved in the web browser or printed out cyber – Bully Alert is available for purchase to help preserve messages. Phone CHILDLINE 1098 is India's 1st 24-hour toll-free number for children. It's a free emergency phone service for children who are in need of assistance. A child or an adult can call 1098 at any time to seek help in case of an emergency. Aarambhindia has a hotline hosted on <http://aarambhindia.org/report/> where you can report child sexual abuse material. It is not necessary for the person who is reporting to identify themselves if they don't want to. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has the POSCO E-Box to report any such offence directly to them online. – <https://ncpcr.gov.in/index1>. The National Commission has carefully outlined areas that need attention and focus, and a well-documented guide for adults – both educators and parents.

Conclusion

Cyber bullying affects all facets of society. Campaigns, legislation, school administrative programs and other movements to recognize and stop cyber bullying are a good first step toward tackling this problem. Promoting the positive use of technology will bring fruitful results. If the bullying is happening on a social platform, consider blocking the bully and formally reporting their behaviour on the platform itself. Social media companies are obligated to keep their users safe. It can be helpful to collect evidence - text messages and screen shots of social media posts to show what's been going on. Technology has been used successfully to support impressive, positive and effective learning, and to enhance the perception of personalized learning by making learning more flexible, creative and accessible.

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