



The pattern of Cyberbullying among adolescents in India: An Exploratory study

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Abstract

Background: Cyber bullying is a malicious use of technology with the intention to bully, scare and humiliate the target person. With the advent of technology in different domains of life, this kind of behaviour, when depicted by vulnerable adolescents, could be understood as an amalgamation of adolescent aggression and unsupervised electronic media communication. Cyber victimization is process in which those who receive it are maltreated by ill-usage of technology.

Aim: To explore the pattern and nature of cyberbullying among the adolescents in India.

Method: 103 adolescents participated in this survey (70 females and 33 males) and data were collected through online platform. Descriptive statistics were applied for calculation.

Results: Findings suggested that 76 percent of female and 85 percent male adolescents have witnessed cyber bullying, 38 percent of adolescents have been victim of cyberbullying, at least once in their lifetime where 13 percent females and 3 percent males were bullied in such a manner that it has affected their ability to learn and feel safe in school. Further, it was found that 6 percent adolescent females and 14 percent adolescent males have cyberbullied others once in lifetime. 10 % of the Indian male adolescents participate in cyber bullying with preferred medium as massive multiplayer games (warcraft, guild of war).

Conclusion: It may be concluded that around 38 percent adolescents have been victim of cyberbullying at least once in life time. They have increased user interface with platforms like Instagram, cell phone messages, Facebook etc. Young Males adolescents are more likely to be victim as well as perpetrator of cyber-bullying.

Keywords – Cyberbullying, Cyber victimization , adolescents

Introduction

Cyberbullying is the form of violence which is intentionally inflicted upon the victim through digital platform via cell phones, computers or tablets to embarrass, harass or intimidate the receiver. It ranges from activities like teasing, sending or posting harmful, mean, false or negative content about another person to sharing personal information about someone without their consent to malign the online reputation of the person.

Smith *et al.* (2013) defined it as an “aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself.” (1)

Due to the widespread access of internet services and rampant increase in the users of social media, there is a sharp increase in the screen time among its users with special emphasis to the most vulnerable group - the adolescents. This makes them susceptible to the act of cyberbullying both in the form of participant as well as victim because it is relatively easier to use. Here, one click is powerful enough to reach the audience by thousands, which exponentially increases the impact of humiliation and bullying. (2) Rao et al (2018) state that cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying since it offers anonymity to the bully followed by difficulty in identification of the victim. Lack of supervision and regulation in the cyberspace makes the issue more strenuous and complex to address.

Now, it is a budding form of violence that is slowly and gradually getting widespread among teenagers. A study conducted by Microsoft ranked India third in cyberbullying where 53 percent of its respondents, mostly comprising of children, admitted to have experienced cyberbullying (The Global Youth Behaviour Survey, 2012) (3).

Every year, there is an increase in access and usage of technology with easily available internet plans fused with political goal of pursuing the dream of “Digital India” thereby increasing the risk of cyberbullying parallelly at an alarming rate which needs necessary intervention.

A cross-sectional study conducted on 254 adolescents (15-19 years) in Kolkata, reported that 10.5 percent students were cyberbullied. Among the victims, more than half resorted to their friends help indicting lack of awareness, understanding and underreporting of these incidents. (5)

Cyberbullying offenders repeatedly and deliberately portray hostile behaviour through various online platforms to cause intentional harm to the receiver in the form of insult or threat.

Meanwhile cyber victimization is process in which others are maltreated by use of communication and information technologies.

Methods

The aim of the study is to explore the pattern and nature of Cyberbullying among the adolescents in India. For this purpose, Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey (2019 version) was administered as a tool among 103 adolescents aged between 12 to 18 in India which included 33 males and 70 females.

Tool - Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey (2019 version) was used for this study. It measures two domains: Victimization Scale and Offending Scale. Constructed by Hinduja and Patchin (2015), this scale has an internal reliability of Cronbach’s Alpha ranging from 0.867 - 0.935 for Cyberbullying Victimization Scale (previous 30 days) and Cronbach’s Alpha ranging from 0.793 - 0.969 for Cyberbullying Offending Scale (previous 30 days).

Statistical Analysis – The analysis was done using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) where Descriptive statistics have been used to calculate percentages, frequencies and mean.

Results

Table 1 – indicating the frequency of bullying between adolescents in percentage

CYBER BULLYING AND ONLINE AGGRESSION SURVEY	FEMALES (in terms of percent)	MALES (in terms of percent)
CYBER BULLYING VICTIM SCALE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I have seen other people being cyberbullied ▪ In my lifetime , I have been cyber bullied ▪ In last 30 days, I have been cyber bullied ▪ In my lifetime, I have been cyber bullied in a way that really affected by ability to learn and feel safe at school 	76	85
In last 30 days...	6	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Someone posted mean or hurtful comments about me online ▪ Someone posted a mean or hurtful picture online of me online . ▪ Someone posted a mean or hurtful video online of me online . ▪ Someone created a mean or hurtful web page about me ▪ Someone spread rumours about me online . ▪ Someone threatened to hurt me through a cell phone text message. ▪ Someone threatened to hurt me online ▪ Someone pretended to be me online and acted in a way that was mean or hurtful ▪ Someone posted mean names or comments online about my race/colour ▪ Someone posted mean names, comments about me with sexual meaning ▪ Someone posted mean names or comments online about my religion 	13	3
	20	29
	1.4	6.3
	1.4	6
	4.2	12.6
	17	38
	9.9	22
	8.5	25
	2.8	22
	19	14
	20	13
	19	12
CYBER BULLYING OFFENDING SCALE	FEMALES	MALES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my lifetime, I have cyberbullied others • In the last 30 days, I have cyberbullied others 	6	14
	1	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I posted mean or hurtful comments about me online • I posted a mean or hurtful picture online of me online. • I posted a mean or hurtful video online of me online . • I spread rumours about me online . • I threatened to hurt me through a cell phone text message . • I threatened to hurt me online • I pretended to be me online and acted in a way that was mean or hurtful 	1	3
	3	3
	4	2
	2	1
	1	3

Findings suggested that 76 percent of female and 85 percent male adolescents have witnessed other people getting cyber bullied and 38 percent of adolescents (males and females) have been victim of cyberbullying,

at least once in their lifetime. Results reported that 13 percent females and 3 percent males have been cyberbullied in their lifetime, in such a way that it has affected their ability to learn and feel safe in school.

To understand the intensity and frequency of these incidents, questions were asked regarding occurrence of event in past 30 days, where it was found 20 percent females and 29 percent males were victims of hurtful comments, 17 percent females and 38 percent males were victims of online rumours, 9.9 percent females and 22 percent males have been threatened online, 25 percent males and 8.5 percent females have seen their fake account being made and misused. It was also found that 14 percent males and 19 percent females have received mean comments about their race/colour. 20 percent females and 13 percent male posted mean names, comments about them with sexual meaning. Also, 19 percent females and 12 percent male have received mean comments online about their religion.

While assessing the cyber bullying offending scale, it was found that 6 percent adolescent females and 14 percent adolescent males have cyberbullied others once in lifetime. 6 percent males have cyberbullied others in past 30 days.

Table 1.2 – It indicates various platforms where the participants faced bullying

PLATFORMS USED	VICTIM OF BULLY (in terms of percent)		BULLY PERPETRATOR (in terms of percent)	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Chat room	18	8	0	1
Email	3	5	0	0
Computer instant messages	9	8	0	2
Cell-phone message	31.2	12.7	0	1
Cell phone	22	10	0	1
PictureMail/Video mail	6.3	7	3	1
Facebook	22	13	0	0
Different social networking site	22	14	0	1
Twitter	3.1	7	0	1
Snapchat	12.5	9	0	0
Youtube	3.1	9	1	0
Instagram	31.2	24	3	1
Massive Mutiplayer games	22	6	6	1
Online games	20	10	10	1

Adolescents have increased interface with different social media platform where victims reported of facing cyberbullying most on Instagram (males 31.2% and females 24 %) followed by Chat rooms (males 18% and females 8%), cell phone messages (males 31.2% and females 12.7%), Facebook (males 22% and females 13%), Massive Multiplayer games (males 22 % and female 6 %) and finally Online games (male 20 % female 10%)

However, 10 percent of the adolescent males have reported to participate in the act of cyber bullying, with their preferred medium for bullying as massive multiplayer games (warcraft, guild of war).

Discussion

A study on American adolescents reported that 88% of teens have seen someone being mean or cruel to another person on a social network site (4). In this study, 76 percent female and 88 percent male teenagers, in India have seen cyberbullying.

In the study conducted by Pew Research Centre in America, it was found that two-thirds of adolescent who faced online bullying also witnessed others joining in and more than one-fifth of the teens report to have joined the harassment themselves (4). In the present study, it was found that around 10 percent of Indian male adolescents have reported to participate in the act of cyber bullying others, especially on Multiplayer games like Warcraft, Guild of War etc. According to Nuccitelli (2012), who categorised verbal abuse in computer-mediated communication as a form of cyberbullying, “the ability to exchange information with gaming opponents and fellow peers, children verbally abuse others, use threatening and profane language” (7).

In the current study, 38 % percent adolescents in India have been victim of cyberbullying among which 13% females and 3% male adolescents were bullied in such a way that they reported it to have affected academic endeavours at school. Another study reported that 9.2% adolescents have experienced cyberbullying alone in the Delhi-NCR region. (CRY,2020) (8)

Findings suggest that one fourth of male adolescents (25 % males) and 8.5 percent females have seen their fake account being made and misused. Similar findings were reported by the study of CRY organization in 2020 where they reported one in every tenth respondent (10%) experiencing profile misuse or hacking of account. However, the percentage was higher among boys (12%) compared to girls (7%) and with age it increased (10% - 13 years to 13% - 17 years). (8)

The findings of current study showed that 20 percent females where as 29 percent males were victims of hurtful comments, 17 percent females and 38 percent males were victims of online rumours and 9.9 percent females and 22 percent males have been threatened online, indicating towards greater prevalence of cyberbullying among male adolescents in India. A study conducted on 630 adolescents in Delhi-NCR region reported similar findings where incidents of Cyber bullying was slightly higher among boys at 9.5 percent out of which 53.8 percent of those reported such incidence. (8)

Over all findings suggests that male adolescents are more vulnerable victims to cyber-bullying and thereby seldom engage in act of cyber bullying, which may form as the basis of a vicious cycle for maladaptive display of aggression. Males are more actively involved in different user interfaces like social media interaction, massive multi player games, Online games (Xbox , Playstation), computer direct messages and social networking website as compared to females which is restricted to social networking website. It may explain the reason for greater instances of cyberbullying victims as well as offenders among male adolescents. Hence anger management of such externalising behaviour can be one essential form intervention.

Along with this intervention even awareness campaign about Cyber safety is essential. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs released a booklet named - A handbook on Cyber Safety for Adolescents/Students in 2018, which provides necessary cyber safety tips and imparts knowledge regarding effective usage of cyberspace. Another mode of awareness was launched through Twitter handle @CyberDost and radio across the nation.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja , authors of Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey , for allowing the usage of their tool for this study. Further I would express gratitude to my supervisor for her guidance and participants for their contribution in the study.

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