



Social Media and Bullying: Indian Scenario and Role of Social Workers

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Abstract

This article discusses the impact of social media on bullying, which has become a significant issue across the world. Bullying involves a person or group of people who physically or mentally harm and threaten someone repeatedly, making victims feel scared and alone. The reasons for bullying can be many, but children who are not taught ethics and value education are more prone to becoming bullies. The article highlights the importance of creating awareness about the adverse effects of bullying, educating children on proper ethics and values to prevent bullying, also illustrates the roles of Social Workers to help victims cope.

Keywords: Social Media, Bullying, Impact, Ethics

Background:

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat have enabled people to communicate, share information, and create communities online. However, these platforms have also created a new avenue for bullying, which can have serious consequences for victims. According to a report by the Cyberbullying Research Center, about 34% of students aged 12 to 17 in the United States reported experiencing cyberbullying at some point in their lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020).

Social Media

Social Media needs no introduction as its being used extensively by all generations of people. The dictionary meaning goes as, "websites and applications that enable the users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." Social media websites or applications such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat YouTube, and blogs to name a few, have given exposure to everyone. During the last 5 years, the number of engagements on various social media sites has increased exponentially.

Bullying

Bullying is an act of offense. It involves a person or a group of people who physically or mentally harm and threaten someone repeatedly. Bullying can make the victim feel scared and alone and leave them scarred.

Bullying can be of many forms. Sometimes it is as obvious as hitting or name-calling. But sometimes bullying can also be hard to see, like leaving someone out on purpose, starting rumours, or saying mean things behind someone's back. Bullying can happen online or in person.

Bullying these days creeps into peoples' minds as early as during their childhood. And it happens across the world. With an education system that does not care about inculcating ethics and value education in their students (or keeps moral education as a subject for which students are evaluated and marked), it is very natural that schools become a place where the bully and the bullied share a common space for hours, every day.

Why does someone bully?

The reasons can be many. Especially for small children who do not have the sense of correct judgment, it essentially becomes the role of parents and the school system to teach them what's wrong and what's right. In a lot of cases, it has been seen that the people who bully are insecure about themselves. Seeing domestic violence early on in childhood can have serious effects on a child. In a majority of cases, children learn very actively from their household. If the parents themselves have differential mindsets towards people of colour, the poor, or are not very respectful of other genders, the children learn to differentiate people on these grounds too. In schools, these like-minded people form groups that give them a collective feeling of supremacy. So, when they bully someone, he/she feels it difficult to open up in front of their friends and family, losing their self-confidence and deciding to suffer alone.

This goes into the future when people grow up. It becomes even worse. With the newfound independence of being young adults, bullying takes up different forms, from mental/sexual harassment to being radical supporters of a wrong mindset of supremacy over other castes, religions, genders, and economic classes.

Effect of Social Media

With the ease of access to social media now a few clicks away, only someone living under a rock wouldn't have used any form of social media in their entire life. While it brings people closer, it also makes it easy for bullies to fulfil their purpose. If someone wishes, he/she can get a degree of anonymity on the web which is impossible in real life. Many people, ranging from teens to young adults, use this to harass the victims. What makes bullying on social media even worse is that there is hardly any way to run away from it. We link so much of our information and personal content on social media that it can be used to harass someone over and over again.

Cyberbullying can be of many forms. Sending emails or texts to someone who doesn't want to keep any contact with you is a form of harassment. Public posts with repeated threats, sexist remarks, hate speech, false accusations, and rumour-mongering, making people a subject of ridicule in groups and pages, hacking into peoples' accounts, or creating fake accounts are all forms of cyberbullying with varying degrees of severity of intentions and consequences.

The problem with being online is that the content never really disappears once it is shared on social media. So even if the culprits are identified and they remove the posts they have used for bullying someone, it is very difficult to track where the post has reached on social media through reshares, screenshots, etc.

Statistics on cyberbullying in India show that the majority of known cases of bullying are among school students.

- As per a survey conducted by Microsoft in 2012, India ranks 3rd among 25 countries in terms of several online bullying cases.
- Around 9.2% of 630 teenagers surveyed in Delhi-NCR have experienced cyberbullying, with a major problem being underreporting as about half of the victims do not report these incidents to teachers, parents, or social media companies, as per a recent study by CRY.
- Vulnerability to bullying rose with the amount of time people used the internet. As per the [study](#) titled ‘Online Study and Internet Addiction’, released on February 18, 2020,
- 22.4% of participants (13-18 years) who used the internet for more than three hours a day were vulnerable to online bullying, while up to 28% of participants who used the internet for more than four hours a day faced cyberbullying.
- A quarter fraction of adolescents also reported seeing a morphed image or video of themselves, and 50% of these were not reported to the police.
- Data released recently by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that cases of cyberstalking or bullying of women or children increased by 36% from [542](#) in 2017 to [739](#) in 2018.
- Meanwhile, the conviction rate for cyberstalking or bullying of women and children fell 15% from 40% in 2017 to 25% in 2018.
- Yet, the reported cases of threatening/blackmail fell 28.3% from 311 to 223 during the same period, which experts said is largely due to underreporting.
- In all, there has been a 25% increase in the number of cybercrime cases from 2017 to 2018, the NCRB data show.

Cyberbullying laws in India

Although India lacks specific cyberbullying laws, provisions of the Information Technology Act and IPC deal with cyberbullying in a way.

Section 67 of the IT Act: prescribes punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form for a term which may extend to five years and also with a fine which may extend to ten lakh rupees.

Section 507 IPC: states that if anyone receives criminal intimidation by way of an anonymous communication then the person giving threats shall be punished with imprisonment for up to two years. By word anonymous, the offense of anti-bullying and cyberbullying is included.

Section 66 E of the IT Act: prescribes punishment for violation of privacy. The section states that any person who intentionally violates privacy by transmitting, capturing, or publishing private pictures of others shall be punished with up to three years imprisonment or a fine up to three lakhs.

What can I do if I'm being bullied online?

- Make sure your social media handles have very strict privacy settings, and keep your details like email, phone, address, etc. away from your profile or strictly accessible by only you.

- Block accounts or numbers that harass you and take a break from social media that you can afford to not use for some time. While doing this, make sure you've screenshots and recordings of all posts, texts, and emails which may be useful as evidence against the culprits.
- Report bullying to the social media platforms where it is happening. Report to the police immediately if you feel the threat is too serious and reporting to social media platforms won't solve the issue.
- Always share your problems with adults you can trust. Talk with your parents, teachers or counsellor, or anyone else you feel comfortable with.

Role of Social Workers in the Context of the Indian Scenario

In India, social media usage has increased rapidly in recent years, and so has the incidence of cyberbullying. The role of social workers in the intervention and prevention of cyberbullying in the Indian scenario is crucial. Here are some key points to consider:

1. Understanding the local context: Social workers need to understand the cultural and social context of Indian society to address cyberbullying effectively. The dynamics of power and privilege are different in India, and social workers need to be aware of how these factors can contribute to cyberbullying.
2. Collaboration with schools and parents: Social workers can work collaboratively with schools and parents to create a safe and supportive environment for students. This can involve developing policies and procedures to address cyberbullying, providing training to educators and parents, and providing emotional support to victims.
3. Educating students about cyberbullying: Social workers can conduct workshops and sessions to educate students about cyberbullying and its impact. This can involve teaching students about the different forms of cyberbullying, how to recognize it, and how to respond to it.
4. Addressing the root causes: Social workers can address the root causes of cyberbullying, such as social inequality, gender-based violence, and discrimination. This can involve developing programs and initiatives that promote inclusion, diversity, and social justice.
5. Providing counseling and support: Social workers can provide counseling and support to students who have experienced cyberbullying. This can involve providing emotional support, helping students develop coping strategies, and connecting them with other resources and services.

Conclusion

Social media has created a new avenue for bullying, which can have serious consequences for victims. Social workers can play a critical role in addressing social media-related bullying by working with individuals, families, and communities to prevent and respond to bullying incidents. They can also use restorative justice practices and education and awareness programs to address cyberbullying and promote positive online behaviour. Through their efforts, social workers can help to create safer and more inclusive online spaces for everyone.

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