

Cyber bullying among Adolescents

Jain George¹, Jinson Alias², Nisbin A. Khader³, Sahadiya Jabbar⁴,
Dr. Neelima Ranjith^{5*}

ABSTRACT

In this modern era, despite several advantages of communication technologies, some people particularly school and college students' misuse these technologies. They often engage in a phenomenon called cyber bullying. **Objective:** To find out the cyber bullying activities of adolescents. Seven different cyber bullying activities such as flaming, harassment, intimidation, denigration, masquerade; outing and exclusion are being measured across three dimensions such as bullying, victimizing and witnessing. **Method:** (a) *Participants:* 1014 higher secondary and college students was (aged 16-20 years) randomly selected from 8 schools and 8 colleges located in Ernakulum district, Kerala. (b) *Material:* Cyber Bullying Survey Questionnaire developed by the investigators (c) *Statistical Analysis:* Percentage of activity in each of the seven areas across three dimensions was calculated. **Result:** All cyber bullying activities exist among higher secondary and college students. The percentage of students who witnessed cyber bullying activities is comparatively higher than that of victimization and bullying. **Conclusion:** The misuse of technology was seen in adolescents of Kerala community.

Keywords: *Cyber bullying, Flaming, Harassment, Intimidation, Denigration, Masquerade, Outing, Exclusion*

Communication technologies put the world at our fingertips. Through email, cell phones, social networking websites, chat rooms, webcams, and internet voice calls, the world seems much smaller. Instead of sending a letter and waiting days or even months for a response, emails provide instant answer. Software such as Skype enables you to make internet calls for a fraction of the cost of a traditional landline. However despite these advantages of communication technologies, there are some drawbacks also. Some people particularly school and college students misuse these technologies. They often engage in a phenomenon

¹ B. Sc Psychology Graduate, Department of Psychology, Union Christian College, Aluva, India

² B. Sc Psychology Graduate, Department of Psychology, Union Christian College, Aluva, India

³ B. Sc Psychology Graduate, Department of Psychology, Union Christian College, Aluva, India

⁴ B. Sc Psychology Graduate, Department of Psychology, Union Christian College, Aluva, India

⁵ Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Union Christian College, Aluva, India

*Responding Author

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called cyber bullying Cyber bullying is when a child or group of children (under the age of 18 years) intentionally intimidate, offend, threaten or embarrass another child or group of children specifically through the use of information technology, such as a website or chat room on the Internet, a cellular telephone or another mobile device.

Cyber bullying can be briefly defined as “sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices” (Willard 2004). According to Willard (2004a), cyber bullying can take different forms, with the main forms ranging from flaming, to harassment, to cyber stalking. The following gives a formal definition for each form:

Flaming - sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group; **Harassment** - repeatedly sending a person offensive messages; **Cyber stalking** - harassment that include threats of harm or is highly intimidating; **Denigration (put-downs)** - sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person to other people; **Masquerade** - pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger; **Outing and trickery** - sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images. **Exclusion** - actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group. (Willard, 2004b).

Different people have different reasons for engage in cyber bullying. According to social cognitive theory, adolescents model the aggressive behavior of their parents or friends (Duncan, 2004; Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, & Unger, 2004). According to Olweus (1993) if the evaluation of the model is positive then the effect will be stronger. Thus, if the observer sees that the model gets reward for their aggressive actions, the aggressive behaviour of the observer is strengthened. Bullies victory over the victims is often the reward in cyber bullying (Olweus, 1993). Thus, all forms of bullying are learned actions which are acquired from their models (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

According to Patchin, Hinduja (2006) Kowalski et al. (2008) and Joinson (1998), people in cyberspace behave in a way they do not in real life because of the effects of disinhibition. Disinhibition means that normal behavioural restraint can become lost or disregarded (Mason, 2008). Researchers have demonstrated that when mode of communication is e-mail or other electronic devices the responses are naïve and can be sharp. In the cyber world people have less social, contextual, and affective signs than in face-to-face communication; hence, they are less sensitive and regretful for the types of behaviors that they exhibit (Mason, 2008). According to McKenna & Bargh (2000), misunderstandings, aggressive responses, hostile and non conforming behaviors are very common in communication through electronic devices when compared to direct face to face interaction. Kowalski et al., (2008) report that people can read the emotional reactions of others in face-to-face interaction, so they can modulate their own behaviour in response to the consequences. In social situations and public evaluations human behaviors are inhibited (Joinson, 1998).

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According to Willard (2007) perpetrators in cyber bullying have no direct social disapproval and punishment for engaging in bullying others and they are not able to see that victims suffer. As a result, their behaviors are often uninhibited and become ruder, harsher, and more difficult to control (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

According to Joinson (1998) disinhibition effects are caused by de-individuation which occurs when accountability cues are reduced. McKenna & Bargh (2000) report that de-individuation also occurs when an individual's self-awareness is blocked or reduced by external factors as it decreases the influence of internal (i.e., self) standards of or guides to behaviour, and increases the power of external, situational cues

Many people who would not bully directly might cyber bully peers because they believe that they could hide it from others and it would be alright to engage in such behaviors virtually (Beran&Li, 2005; Willard, 2004). Li (2010) found that over 40% would do nothing if they were cyber bullied and only about one in ten would inform adults.

Studies have shown gender difference in cyber bullying. Researchers have pointed out that cyber bullying is more prevalent among girls (Anderson & Sturm, 2007; Willard, 2007) because cyber bullying is text-based, and girls tend to be more verbal than boys (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). However, research findings are inconsistent across studies. Some studies found that boys were more likely to engage in cyber bullying than girls (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008; Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009; Shariff, 2008), and girls were more likely to be victimized online (Dehue et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Girls experience indirect forms of bullying such as rumours spreading and social exclusion (Kowalski et al, 2008; Olweus, 1993; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Boys reported being cyber bullied than girls (Li, 2006). Other researchers, reported no significant sex differences in cyber bullying. (Arcak, 2009; Beran & Li, 2005).

Researchers have argued that cyber bullying peaks later in middle school or in high school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Lenhart (2007) reveals that older girls aged 15 to17 are more likely to report being bullied online than any other age and gender group

Cyber bullying in India

According to global youth online behaviour survey (2011), over half of children in India have been bullied online. The reports put India third on the list behind china (70%) and Singapore (58%). Another study revealed (India today, 2012) that the frequency of cyber bullying in India is higher than that of western nations, including the US (15%), Britain (11%), and France (5%). A new poll conducted by global research company Ipsos finds that more than three out of ten parents (32%) in India say their children have been victim of cyber bullying. The findings also disclosed that 45 percent of Indian parents believed a child in their community was being cyber bullied, while a majority (53%) of parents online in India is aware of the issue (India Infoline News Service). According to National crime

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Bureau the total case registered under IT act 2000 was 966 in 2010 and 1791 in 2011, 2876 in 2012 and 4356 in 2013. A total of 4,356 cases were registered under IT Act during the year 2013 as compared to 2,876 cases during the previous year (2012), thus showing an increase of 51.5% in 2013 over 2012 (Raj, 2015).

Kerala is 5th position in cybercrime. As per the statistics of the National Crime Records Bureau, 2,876 cybercrimes were registered in 2012, an increase of 60.6%. In Kerala, according to crime enquiry cell report of the Kerala police, there is 89.23% rise in cybercrime cases in 2010 compared to year 2009 and the trend is only growing upward. Official statistics states that Cochin, the commercial capital of Kerala, ranks first in various forms of cyber crimes, like cyber hacking, stalking, cheating, online monetary forgery, sending pornographic mails and obscene SMS messages. In most of the cases youths are the main culprits. In Kochi, five to ten cases are filed every month against social network manipulations. However, we have no published report about rate of cyber bullying in Kerala.

In the present scenario, usage of cyberspace among school and college students has increased dramatically (NDTV Press Trust of India, 2009). Generally, adolescence shows a tendency to misuse the cyberspace either intentionally, or unintentionally. It may lead to different cyber bullying activities such as flaming, harassment, intimidation and so on. Most people are not aware that these activities are punishable by law. They don't even know what all activities come under cyber bullying. This lack of awareness and increased accessibility to electronic communication devices make people more and more vulnerable to this phenomenon. Anyhow, limited studies are reported from Kerala.

The present study attempts to find out the existence, and rate of cyber bullying in secondary school and college students in Ernakulam Dist. Cyber bullying, if at all exist in the society, it becomes necessary to provide awareness campaigns to not only the students but also parents, teachers and other educational authorities.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of 1014 higher secondary and college students (age 16-20 years), randomly selected from 8 schools and 8 colleges located in different areas of Ernakulam district in Kerala. The institutions were also selected randomly from the list of institutions in Ernakulam district.

Materials

Cyber bullying survey questionnaire (self prepared by the investigators; was based on seven cyber bullying activities). The questionnaire consists of four sections in which Section A gathers the personal details of the individual participant, Section B measures the usage of mobile phones and internet among the participants, Section C involves questions regarding seven different cyber bullying activities such as flaming, harassment, intimidation, denigration, masquerade, outing, and exclusion. The information regarding each activity obtains from the

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response to four sub questions which measures the extent of victimization, bullying, witnessing, and reaction of the participant to the specific activity. Section D gathers information about the general opinion and awareness about cyber bullying that occurs in school and college settings.

Data Collection

Verbal consent from the individual participants was obtained after explaining the necessity of the study. The questionnaires were given to those who expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

Scoring

The first three sub questions of seven different cyber bullying activities that come under section C were rated on a four point scale, and the question concerned with the reaction of the participant is rated on a five point scale.

Analysis of data

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. Frequency tables were tabulated.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study explores three dimensions of cyber bullying viz. bullying, victimizing and witnessing along seven different activities, the percentage of students who committed cyber bullying, the percentage of students who became cyber victims, and the percentage of students who witnessed cyber bullying. Results are indicated in tables:

Table 1: Percentage of existence of cyber bullying activities among adolescents

Dimensions	Response	Types of Cyber Bullying Activity						
		Flaming	Harassment	Intimidation	Denigration	Masquerade	Outing	Exclusion
Victimization	Yes	21.9	8.6	3.5	21	25.3	14.5	34.4
	No	78.1	91.4	96.6	79	74.7	85.5	65.7
Bullying	Yes	15.1	7.6	3.5	19.7	12.8	9.3	37.5
	No	84.9	92.4	96.6	80.4	87.2	90.7	62.5
Witnessing	Yes	40	28.5	13.8	84.3	44.3	31.9	54.5
	No	60	71.5	86.2	65.7	55.7	68.1	45.5

Table 1 shows the percentages of students who committed different cyber bullying activities such as flaming, harassment, intimidation, denigration, masquerade, outing, exclusion which

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are 15.1, 7.6, 3.5, 19.7, 12.8, 9.3 and 37.5 percentages respectively. The percentage of students who were victimized through different cyber bullying activities such as flaming, harassment, intimidation, denigration, masquerade, outing and exclusion are 21.9, 8.6, 3.5, 21, 25.3, 14.5 and 34.4 respectively. The percentage of students who witnessed flaming, harassment, intimidation, denigration, masquerade, outing and exclusion are 40, 28.5, 13.8, 84.3, 44.3, 31.9 and 54.5 respectively. The percentage of individual response to absence of cyber bullying activities is higher than those reporting the presence of the same.

Results indicate the existence of seven different cyber bullying activities at varying degrees, but only to a lesser extent. The percentage of students who witnessed seven different cyber bullying activities is comparatively higher than those of being victimized and those who are bullying. It shows that cyber bullying activities are taking place; however, students are not reporting it. Early studies have similar finding where students are seen to be reluctant to report bullying. Students feel reluctant to report to adults for two reasons. (1) Students distrust those adults (2) they fears that cyber bully could get back at them and escalate the problem (Quing Li, 2010). Lack of awareness about cyber crime can also be another reason for not reporting such issues. The Ipsos survey among parents show that only 53% of parents are aware of cyber bullying. None of such studies have been reported from Kerala. Hence we are not sure to what extent parents are aware of this issue in Kerala.

The highest percentage of witnessing among adolescents takes place in denigration i.e., sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person to other people. The least witnessed activity is intimidation i.e., use of any gesture that interferes or disrupts a child's freedom to coexist with peers. The intimidation can be on the basis of race, nationality, origin, gender, color, sexual orientation, or any form of physical, mental or sensory disability. In case of victimization, the highest percentage is in exclusion i.e., actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group. Students find this an easy method to express their hatred toward another member, would be engaging in this behavior without even knowing that they are actually bullying someone. The lowest percentage is in intimidation. In bullying dimension, highest percentage is in exclusion actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group and the least percentage is in intimidation (Willard, 2004b). Among the seven different cyber bullying activities exclusion is the most commonly occurring and intimidation is the least occurring activities. The disparity between the rate of victimization and bullying in different activities is very small except in the case of masquerade i.e., pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger . The percentage of victimization in masquerade is considerably higher than the percentage of bullying. Based on student's reaction to each cyber bullying activities, the most upsetting form of cyber bullying is intimidation and harassment and the least upsetting one is denigration.

CONCLUSION

Overall, from the study, it can be concluded that even though the percentage indicating the existence of bullying among adolescents is less; cyber bullying exist among adolescents. Adolescents are either being victimized, or they engage in bullying. Parents and adults are either not aware of what is happening in the adolescent's life or must be considering this as silly mischievous behaviour of youth not worthy of taking it a serious issue. Awareness regarding cyber crimes and cyber bullying across all sections of society would be helpful to gain more insight into this issue.

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