

Cyberbullying Victimization among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is referred to as a cybercrime. It is a new form of bullying as it is a repeated behavior of bullying causing psychological or emotional harm to another individual using sources like- social networking sites, online games and through communication devices. People of different genders, and sexual-orientation like- transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual people are at a higher risk of cyberbullying victimization within the population because of their sexual preferences. This study aims to compare the cyberbullying victimization differences among heterosexual and non-heterosexual adolescents. In addition, the study also explores the possible differences of cyberbullying across various platforms such as, online games, social media, and through email and cell phone. Total 131 adolescents 12-17 years of age participated in the study from the different cities and 100 (N=100) individuals finally included in the study, the sample further sub divided into two groups of Heterosexual (n=50) and Non-Heterosexual (n=50) Individuals. The Data analysis was done using SPSS version 27.0. In the data analysis descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U Test was implemented. The results indicated that there is a significant difference in Cyberbullying victimization between Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Adolescents. Non-Heterosexual Individuals are more cyberbullied than the Heterosexual Individuals in accordance to our findings. In addition, Non-Heterosexual individuals reported more cyberbullying victimization than Heterosexual Victimization on online gaming platforms, social media platforms and through email and cell phone.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Victimization, Heterosexual, Non-Heterosexual*

In the 21st century we the social beings have gotten surrounded by technology and devices in this technological era. The individuals of any class, gender, sexuality, age, educated or uneducated individuals are using devices and services like- Mobile phones, Gaming devices, laptops or computer, internet, social media apps and sites etc. When there were no gadgets, the human interactions were limited to face to face, but in this 21st century there are gradual changes can be seen in terms of human interactions, now our interactions are not just face to face or on a phone call. After invention of social media and easily accessible Internet the human interactions on online forms like- online meeting, online chats, dating apps etc., changed the whole scenario of human interactions and communication. The

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most used social media apps or services in India are Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook. In India not only Adults but teenagers also use these social media platforms by faking their age on the social media platforms.

This technological era come up with a new form of challenges like- Privacy Breaching, Information and Identity stealing and one of the most prominent Cyberbullying which is another form of Bullying. The term Bullying is the negative treatment typically is the seeking to impose harm, insult, or injury, and it involves physical or verbal strikes or attacks. Although, bullying does not always verbal or physical, it can be also psychological (*American Psychological Association, 2010; Olweus, 1993*). The term Cyberbullying is a new form of bullying.

Cyberbullying is associated by bullying as it is a repeated behavior of bullying causing psychological or emotional harm to another individual using sources like- social networking sites on internet and through other devices including Gaming devices like- PlayStation, Computers, Xbox, Wii, Mobiles etc.

Adolescence and Cyberbullying

Adolescence is not only a phase of development and growth it's also come up with emergence of risk-taking behaviours and some challenges. Individuals during this phase are generally vulnerable and can't completely interlink between actions and its consequences (Ang RP, 2015). When people must retain self-discipline to obtain good achievements in novel situations, children and teenagers typically perform worse than adults due to the heat of passion, peer-pressure, peer rejection, etc. Adolescents avoid the threat of rejecting standardised risk interventions due to their attention seeking, thrill seeking, impulsiveness and other attributes (Reyna VF, Farler F, 2006).

Worldwide the One-third population of internet users are adolescents and children under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2017). Digital Platforms like social media sites, dating applications, digital meeting platforms and even online gaming platforms provides a new and innovative form of interpersonal communication and building of interpersonal relationships (Thomas HJ, Connor JP, Scott JG, 2015). The Malevolent side of using internet in young individuals is that they may cyberbully others or victimized from the bullies in virtual space.

Cyberbullying also referred to as cybercrime, cyberbullying is a digital form of bullying unlike traditional bullying it leaves digital footprints behind which are considered as evidences and sources of bullying which helps the cyberbullying victims for justice. There are adverse effects of cyberbullying on victims are found in many studies like, depression, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, poor-academic performance etc. (*American Psychological Association, 2010*).

Some of the examples of cyberbullying are-Spreading rumors, falsifying information about the victim; Posting inappropriate content like, photos or videos of victim; Falsifying identity of a victim and making false user ids; Trolling-use of inappropriate language like, verbal abuse on posts or content; Targeting specific individual on group chats which threatening and harmful for an individual, etc.

Cyberbullying effects are just as dangerous or unfavorable as conventional bullying. Effects of cyberbullying involve- the victim may feel- fear, sadness, anger, frustration, helplessness, powerlessness, and fear; victims may suffer mental health issues like- increased stress,

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anxiety and depression; low self-esteem issues can be experienced by the victims (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Spears et al., 2009); suicidal ideation may be experienced by both victims and bullies; they attempt to suicide more as compared to other individuals who never experienced cyberbullying. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Individuals of different genders, sexual orientation or sexual preferences like- transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual people are at a higher risk of cyberbullying victimization within the population because of their sexual-orientation (Olweus, 1993).

Adolescence and Sexuality

Adolescence is a critical period of development of sexual identity and sexual-orientation although sexuality development starts as early as in the womb and continues throughout the individual's lifespan. A person's sexuality is especially shaped throughout the phase of adolescence because of the enormous hormonal, physical, and psychological changes that occur during this period. These changes affect how a person navigates relationships, family dynamics and cultural expectations in addition to their biological and emotional knowledge of sexuality (Dennis JF, 2013).

The interaction of biological, psychological and social elements is highlighted by the biopsychosocial model of adolescent sexual development. Puberty is biologically brought on by hormonal changes, which also cause secondary sexual traits and changes that affect the psychological and physical facets of sexuality. Adolescents' perceptions and expressions of their sexuality are influenced by psychological elements including temperament and personality. According to research, compared to more outgoing people, introverted people may have a harder time expressing their sexual identity and interests (Sujita KK, Ananya C, Abhishek PS, 2015). A young individual sexuality is also greatly influenced by social factors including- peer relationships, parenting styles, cultural views and society conventions.

Adolescence is referred to as the "Genital Stage" in Sigmund Freud's psychosexual development theory, during which period individuals start evaluating their sexual identities through social interactions. Freud said that although sexual urges are dormant during infancy (latency stage), they become more active during adolescence and are often focused on heterosexual relationships. He proposed that a fundamental component of the human experience is the yearning of sexual connection, which persists into maturity (Dave S, Dave A, 2014).

Adolescents' views on sexuality are greatly influenced by internet platforms in the current digital era. Unhealthy comparisons, low self-esteem, and even social disengagement can result from exposure to unrealistic representations of body image and idealized sexual conduct. Many young people may experience pressure to live up to unrealistic expectations, which can affect their self-esteem and capacity to build positive connections. Emotional anguish and trouble expressing oneself authentically might result from this cycle of irrational expectations and self-doubt (Hegde A, Chandran S, Pattnaik JI, 2022).

Sexuality and Gender

Gender and sexuality are often used interchangeably but they are distinct concepts, but we generally use them as a one concept. Both the gender and sexuality are important parts of our sense of self, but some people don't know the difference and do mistakes in using these

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concepts. For example- someone can assume a transgender as a lesbian, but they are not interconnected (Vinney, 2024).

The terminologies of Gender and Sexuality are different. It is important to understand both the terminologies. Gender is socially created concept and a person's inner concept as a Woman, Man. And/or non-binary individual. Gender identity is defined by the people in their subjective ways of experiences which they feel they belong to which type of gender. Individuals have personal ways of expressing their gender identity on the basis of their deep feelings and understandings with themselves. It can extend to identities for example- Genderfluid, Agender, Aliagender, Androgynous etc. (Vinney, 2024).

The term Sexuality is a broader term that comprises all the aspects person's sexual identity, which involves sexual attraction, feelings, preferences and feelings. Sexuality is an umbrella term in which sexual-orientation is one of its dimensions.

According to American Psychological Association, "sexual orientation is a component of identity that includes a person's sexual or emotional attraction to another person and the behavior that may result from this attraction" (American Psychological Association, 2015). Sexuality includes a plentitude of orientation. The commonly known orientations such as, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Heterosexual, Asexual, Pansexual etc.

Rationale of the Study

This topic of the study was taken by the researcher because the researcher was curious to know about how in this Technological Era in which everyone is using social media platform no matter if they are educated or uneducated, living in rural areas or urban areas, heterosexual or non-heterosexual, etc, everyone is using online communication services and applications where individuals interact with each other for friendship or relationships, for professional works, exploration or any other purposes, which makes them more prone to be in the cyberbullying involvement in the population. An Argentinian study shows there are more Cyberbullying offenders as compared to Traditional Bullying (Resett & Gámez-Guadix 2017).

The researcher would like to investigate to know which sexuality groups among adolescents are being involved in cyberbullying, as the adolescents are the one-third of the population worldwide use internet the most (UNICEF, 2017). The adolescence period come up with emergence of risk-taking behaviours and some challenges. In addition, during the phase of Adolescence the young individuals are particularly vulnerable and can't completely interlink between their actions and consequences (Ang RP, 2015). Adolescence is a crucial phase in the development of identity, including sexual identity and sexual-orientation. Individuals with different genders and sexual-orientations are at higher risk of cyberbullying victimization (Olweus, 1993). According to the researcher this matter of study is important to be studied to know the cyberbullying victimization significant differences among the heterosexual and non-heterosexual adolescents, as there are less studies done on this topic in India, so this study may help to identify which sexuality groups are at higher risk of cyberbullying victimization in our country, this might help to develop preventive measures for future applications for counseling and guidance, therapeutic approaches and measures, etc.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- **O1-** To study cyberbullying victimization among heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals across various platforms.
- **O2-** To compare cyberbullying victimization among heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals.

Hypothesis

- **H1-** There is a significant difference between cyberbullying victimization among heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals.

Sample

Snowball sampling method used in the study, 131 Adolescents of age group of 12 years-17 years participated across different cities of India, from them we selected 100 individuals (N=100) 50 Heterosexual (n=50) and 50 Non-Heterosexual (n=50). The data was collected online through Google Forms.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria-

The following individuals can participate in this study; Heterosexual Individuals- Individuals who identified themselves as Male and Female who experience romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex or gender; Non-Heterosexual Individuals- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer Adolescents of age 12 years to 17 years.

Variables

- (IV)- Cyberbullying Victimization- Cyberbullying victimization is referred as the extent to which a person has been cyberbullied.
- (DV)- Sexual-orientation- Sexual-orientation is referred as an enduring pattern of a person's emotional, sexual, and/or romantic attraction.

Tools Used in Data Collection

Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Scale (2019) by Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin: This Questionnaire was developed by Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin in 2002 previously, it has been modified in 2019. This questionnaire aims to assess Cyberbullying Victimization and Offending Behaviour among Adolescents of age 12 years - 17 years. It contains two scales one is Cyberbullying Victimization Scale which has 9 items, and Second Cyberbullying Offending Scale which also has 9 items in it. The participants are supposed to choose one option as a response from the Four options given which is most appropriate according to them. There are three types of scoring methods for each scale it is same, one is Variety Scale method, second is Summary Scale method and third is Dichotomy scoring method and the higher scores represents more cyberbullying victimization and offending experiences.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis of data was done using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. For the Hypothesis Mann-Whitney U Test was implemented to compare the Cyberbullying Victimization Differences in Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals as our data did not meet the assumptions of Parametric tests, and Descriptive statistics were employed for further analysis.

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Procedure

The data was collected through various sources such as Social Media influencers, Non-government organisation, Online community groups, etc. Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Scale was used to collect data through snow ball technique. The Questionnaire was implemented through an online google form. Out of 131 Individuals data collected, only 100 was analysed comprising of 50 Heterosexual and 50 Non-Heterosexual. Descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U Test were used to analyse the data as our data did not meet the assumptions of Parametric tests. The computation was carried out using SPSS Version 27.0. The next step was to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics was implemented the following values were obtained; Heterosexual (n=50), Mean (\bar{x} =0.84), Median (0), and Standard Deviation (SD=1.695). And Non-Heterosexual (n=50), Mean (\bar{x} =8.4600), Median (7.0000), and Standard Deviation (SD=6.03463).

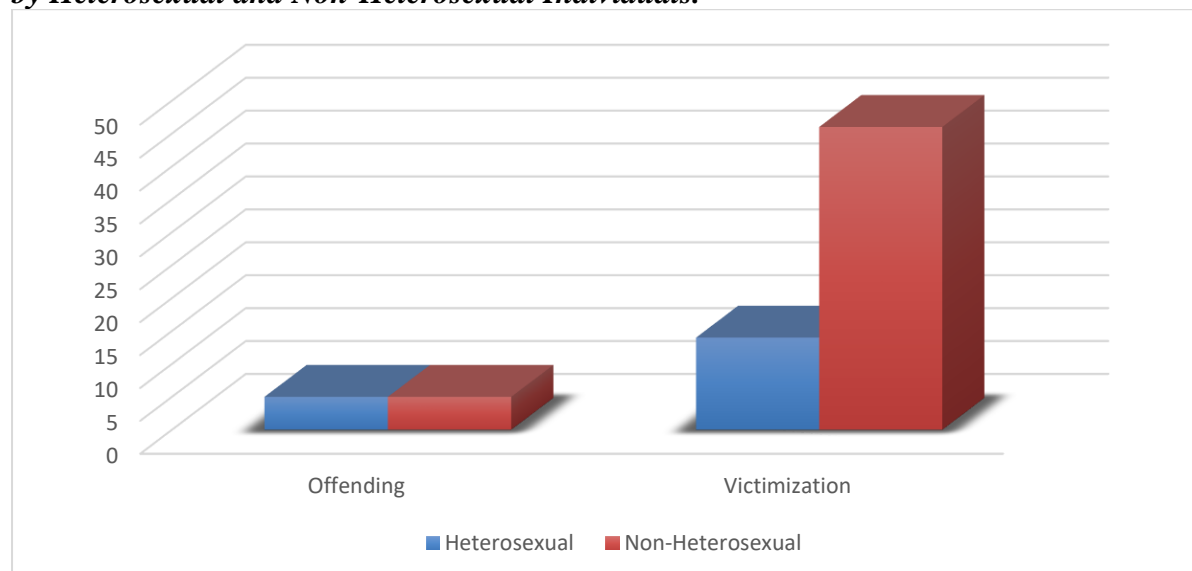
Table 1: Central Tendencies of Cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals.

		Heterosexual Victimization	Non-Heterosexual Victimization
N	Valid	50	50
	Missing	0	0
Mean		.84	8.4600
Median		0	7.0000
Std. Deviation		1.695	6.03463

Table 2: Frequency of Cyberbullying victimization and offending reported among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals.

	Heterosexual	Non-Heterosexual	Total
Offending	5	5	10
Victimization	14	46	60

Figure 1: Frequency Bar Graph of Cyberbullying Victimization and Offending reported by Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals.



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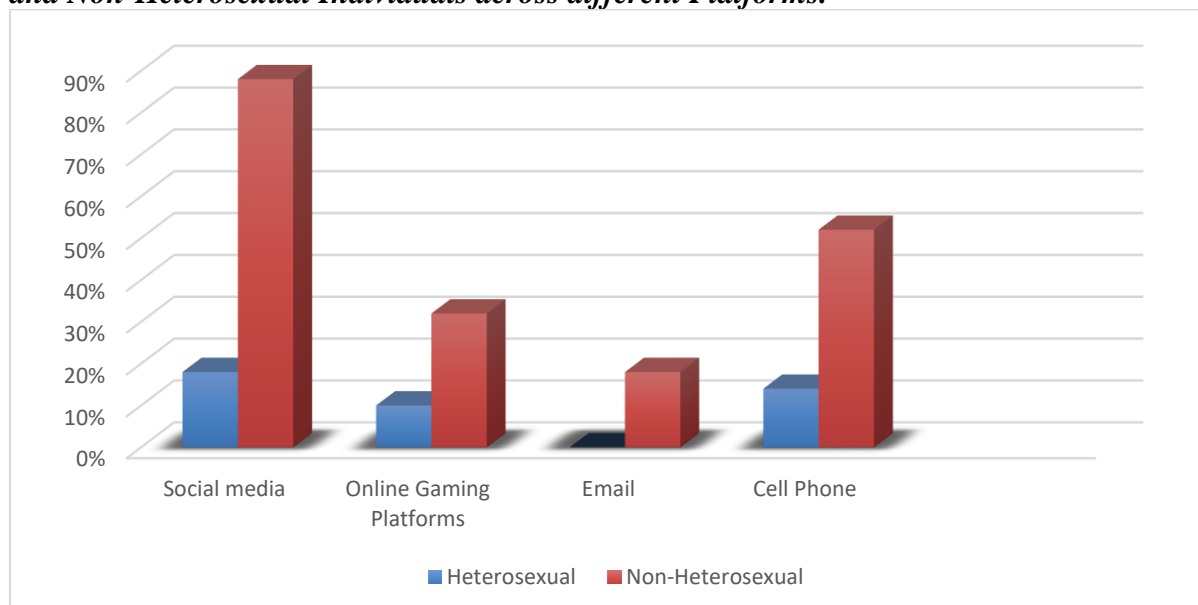
Table 3: Frequency of Cyberbullying victimization reported by Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals across various platforms.

		Heterosexual Victims	Non-Heterosexual Victims	Total
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	Chat/Groups	3	10	13
	Facebook	1	34	35
	Twitter-X	1	8	9
	Snapchat	1	17	18
	YouTube	0	7	7
	Instagram	4	44	48
	Other Social Media Sites	2	43	45
Cell Phone	Cell Phone Texts	7	26	33
	Phone Call	5	19	24
Email	Picture or Video Mail	0	6	6
	General text Mail	0	7	11
ONLINE GAMING PLATFORMS		5	16	21

Table 4: Percentage table of Cyberbullying Victimization reported by Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals across different Platforms.

Platforms	Heterosexual	Non-Heterosexual
Social media	18%	88%
Online Gaming Platforms	10%	32%
Email	0%	18%
Cell Phone	14%	52%

Figure 2: Percentage Bar Graph of Cyberbullying Victimization reported by Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals across different Platforms.



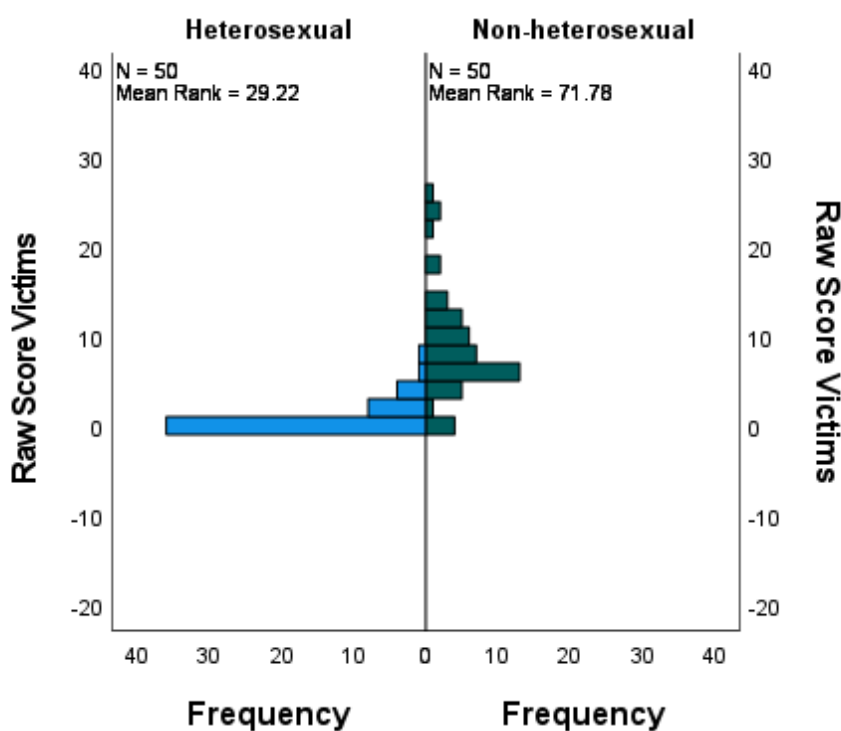
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Mann-Whitney U Test was implemented upon the sample data and the following table contain the results of that analysis.

Table 5: Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary	
Total N	100
Mann-Whitney U	2314.000
Wilcoxon W	3589.000
Test Statistic	2314.000
Standard Error	140.219
Standardized Test Statistic	7.588
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	<.001

Figure 3: Graph Representing Cyberbullying Victimization Mean Rank Between Heterosexual and Non- Heterosexual Groups.



DISCUSSION

There is more cyberbullying victimization in Non-heterosexual individuals than Heterosexual Individuals on Gaming Platforms, Social Media, Email and Cell phone as reported by the participants of the study. According to our findings 10% of Heterosexual individuals are cyberbullied on Online Gaming Platforms and 32% of Non-Heterosexual individuals are cyberbullied on the Online Gaming Platforms. These results are in accordance to previous studies (Ballard & Welch, 2017) which found that there are higher rates of cyberbullying victimization among Non-heterosexual Players.

According to our research results 18% of Heterosexual individuals are cyberbullied and 88% of Non-Heterosexual Individuals on Social Media platforms as reported by the participants Non-Heterosexual Individuals are cyberbullied more than the Heterosexual Individuals on social media.

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According to our findings 0% of Heterosexual individuals are Cyberbullied through Email and 18% of Non-Heterosexual individuals are Cyberbullied as reported by the participants. Non-Heterosexual Individuals are cyberbullied more than the Heterosexual Individuals through Email. In addition, 14% of Heterosexual individuals are cyberbullied and 52% of Non-Heterosexual Individuals are cyberbullied as reported by the participants, Non-Heterosexual Individuals are cyberbullied more than the Heterosexual Individuals through Cell phone.

The main aim of this study was to compare the cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Adolescents. The Hypothesis states that there is a significant difference between cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals. According to our findings there is a significant difference (at 0.01 level) found in cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and Non-heterosexual Sample groups. The Mean Rank value of Heterosexual sample group (29.22), which is less than the Non-Heterosexual sample group (71.78) which means non-heterosexual individuals are more cyberbullied than the heterosexual individuals. This is in accordance to previous researches (DeSmet et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Myers et al., 2017) which found that there are significant differences in Cyberbullying victimization between Heterosexual and Non-heterosexual individuals. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted that there is a significant difference between cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual individuals. Also results indicated that Non-Heterosexual individuals are more cyberbullied than the Heterosexual individuals.

Limitations and Suggestions

There are certain limitations of this study such as, due to the insufficient sample size and the sample population being adolescents the generalization ability is restricted and limits the predictability of the results. Insufficient sample size limits the data to some extent so generalization of the findings is not possible, and due to the Cyberbullying variable being socially undesirable so the responses given by the sample may be distorted.

To eliminate such limitations the following measures can be taken such as, a larger sample size can be taken to generalize the findings, as there are less studies done on cyberbullying among different genders and sexual-orientations in India, more studies can be done on different social communities, genders, and sexual-orientations, etc.

CONCLUSION

The present study focuses on comparing the Cyberbullying victimization differences between Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Adolescents. Also, it focuses to study the cyberbullying victimization differences in various platforms like, Online Gaming Platforms, Social Media Platforms and through Email and Cell phone. It is clearly found that there are significant differences in Cyberbullying victimization among Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Individuals. The Non-Heterosexual participants reported more cyberbullying victimization experiences across various platforms such as, Gaming Platforms, Social Media and through email and cell phone.

Cyberbullying is considered as a cybercrime because it can lead to negative effects on mental health on victims, also low self-esteem, poor academic performance, suicidal ideation, depression isolation and loneliness etc. were found in previous researches. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Resett & Gámez-Guadix, 2017). We can

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say that in India due to less acceptance of different genders and sexual differences these people are more likely to become a cyberbully victims.

More researches can be done on cyberbullying involvement among various genders and sexual-orientations, their experiences of cyberbullying victimization to find the negative impact on various aspects of life, to find attributes which leads to of cyberbullying victimization which might help to develop preventive measures for future applications for future guidance, therapeutic approaches and measures. Also to enlighten the people and increase the acceptance in the society to prevent cyberbullying cases within different population.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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