



Navigating Cyberbullying Among Adolescents: A Comprehensive Examination of Prevalence, Risk Factors, Consequences, and Treatment Approach.

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ABSTRACT

The provision of electronic devices and various Internet applications to adolescents has not only presented them with novel communication opportunities, but has also introduced a range of detrimental social interactions commonly referred to as cyberbullying. In recent years, cyberbullying has garnered considerable attention as a distinctive manifestation of bullying as it poses a significant public health concern worldwide due to its detrimental impact on the psychological well-being of individuals, particularly among children and adolescents. It has been noted that adolescents may play two distinct roles in the context of cyberbullying: as victims and as perpetrators. Recognizing that adolescents involved in cyberbullying, whether subjected to it or engaging in it-report a range of emotional, behavioural symptoms, and school-related challenges. Therefore, this chapter provides an in-depth review of studies covering the definitions, prevalence, and the age and gender dynamics of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration. It further examined the risk and protective factors associated with cyberbullying from the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators. It then extends to the impacts of cyberbullying on adolescents' mental health, highlighting the consequences of both

victimization and perpetration. Ultimately, the chapter outlines treatment and preventive strategies for school officials and parents, presenting a comprehensive approach to effectively address this pervasive issue on a global scale.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Prevalence, Risk and Protective Factors, Psychological Interventions, Adolescents*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of electronic devices and various Internet applications to adolescents has not only presented them with novel communication opportunities, but has also introduced a range of detrimental social interactions commonly referred to as cyberbullying (Palermi et al., 2017). Over the past few years, cyberbullying has garnered considerable recognition as a distinctive manifestation of bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010) as possess detrimental effects on the psychological well-being of individuals, particularly among children & adolescents make it a matter of great concern for public health on a global scale (Ranjith et al., 2023).

Throughout adolescence, individuals experience rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes, which impacts their emotions, cognition, decision-making abilities, and interactions with the world around them (WHO). In addition to the numerous rapid changes, they are also at high risk for experiencing various mental health conditions. Among these, cyberbullying has emerged as a significant concern. Considering the adolescent period as a crucial phase in human development, experiencing bullying during this period is considered as a widespread public health issue that impacts the psychological growth of adolescents and can often continue into their adulthood (Sigurdson et al., 2015; Maurya et al., 2022). Therefore, the aim of the chapter is to comprehensively examine cyberbullying among adolescents, including prevalence, risk factors, consequences, & treatment approaches.

Definition of Cyberbullying

The concept of "cyberbullying" has its roots dating back to the year 1999 (Englander et al., 2017). Cyberbullying is described 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 him or herself” (Smith et al., 2018).

As per Englander et al. (2017) the Cyberbullying definition has considered three main criteria: (a) intentional act, (b) power imbalance, and (c) repetition. However, there is a debate

regarding the significance of these three criteria to define Cyberbullying (Iqbal & Jami, 2022). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) have omitted power imbalance element in their definition of Cyberbullying. They define it “as the intentional & repetitive infliction of harm through electronic text”. Furthermore, Englander et al. (2017) stated that the victims of cyberbullying suffer adverse consequences, even in cases where the act is not deliberate & not repeated (Iqbal & Jami, 2022). Moreover, Menesini et al. (2012) proposed that repetition is deemed superfluous in the cyberbullying definition (Iqbal & Jami, 2022). Furthermore, it was evident that there exists a certain degree of overlap between cyberbullying and traditional bullying (Ybarra et al., 2014). Hence, it becomes crucial to conceptualize how the Cyberbullying is different from traditional Bullying.

Distinguishing Traditional Bullying from Cyberbullying

Traditional Bullying is characterized by one or more individuals deliberately inflicting pain or harm and consistently targeting a vulnerable peer through aggressive in-person actions (whether physical, verbal, social, or psychological). This dynamic involves a power imbalance and a relationship of dominance and submission that takes place over time. Nevertheless, when this behaviour is executed using information and communication technology, it is commonly known as Cyberbullying (Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2017). Several studies have indicated that while there was a reliable association between Cyberbullying and Traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2014), it is crucial to examine cyberbullying separately as it has been found to cause harm that surpasses the consequences of traditional bullying (Englander et al., 2017; Cross et al., 2015). ‘

The existing body of literature recognizes three distinctive features. First, Cyberbullying may result in more enduring effects compared to traditional bullying, given that information transmitted electronically is both permanent and accessible to the public, potentially spreading extensively if not promptly removed (Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008; Yang & Huang, 2023). Secondly, it can exert a more widespread and distressing emotional harm compared to traditional bullying as a result of the constant connectivity supplied by ICTs, allowing for round-the-clock communication. Consequently, victims may struggle to seek respite from the harassment (Yang & Huang, 2023; John et al., 2018). The third feature is that the unique characteristics of Internet-based computer-mediated communication poses obstacle for intervention. One such challenge arises from the anonymity and deindividuation effect, which diminishes individuals' self-discipline and altruism in the virtual realm compared to the physical world. Consequently, this poses difficulties for cyberbullying interventions in terms

of identifying, reaching, and educating both perpetrators and bystanders within the virtual domain (Yang & Huang, 2023; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Cassidy et al., 2013).

Understanding the Various Forms of Cyberbullying

Hinduja and Patchin (2007) have identified various forms of Cyberbullying which encompasses the act of sharing threatening or abusive email and instant messages, making derogatory remarks about an individual on a website, or engaging in physical threats or intimidation online. Less severe instances of cyberbullying may involve being ignored, disrespected, singled out, or otherwise bothered. On the other hand, more severe forms of cyberbullying include spreading rumors about an individual, stalking them, or making physical threats towards them. Moreover, Smith and Slonje (2010) have identified seven specific types of cyberbullying that fall into two categories (Suzuki & Asaga, 2012) (*refer to Table 1*).

Furthermore, during cyberbullying incidents, individuals may play two distinct roles: Cyberbullying victimization and Cyberbullying perpetration. Brighi and colleague during their research, focused on the development of a tool titled the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ) to assess cyberbullying. In their study, the authors took into account both of these manifestations (Brighi et al., 2012). As discussed in the earlier section on cyberbullying definitions, cyberbullying victimization refers to individuals who experience or are targeted by cyberbullying behaviours, while cyberbullying perpetration refers to those who engage in or carry out such behaviours. Acknowledging that adolescents may engage in both roles and experience negative effects on their mental health, in the next sections, we aim to investigate the prevalence, risk factors, consequences, and treatment approaches related to cyberbullying victimization and perpetration among adolescents.

Table 1

Types of Cyberbullying

I. Mobile Phone based Cyberbullying

1. Mobile phone call bullying
2. Text message bullying
3. Picture/video clip bullying

II. Internet Based Cyberbullying

4. Email bullying
5. Chat room bullying
6. Bullying through instant messaging
7. Bullying via websites

Prevalence

Cyberbullying is a prevalent issue that children of all ages may encounter. However, it is possible that cyberbullying may manifest later in life, typically around the age of 14, as children begin to devote more time to using their mobile devices (Suzuki & Asaga, 2012). While individuals of different age groups can be victims of cyberbullying, much researches emphasises on middle and high school students (Suzuki & Asaga, 2012).

According to a study conducted in India (Ranjith et al., 2023), it was found that students in the 10th (Approximately 14-15 years of old) standard had a significantly higher likelihood of being victims as well cyberbullying perpetrators compared to students in other standards. This could be attributed to the maturation process of children, where their curiosity in exploring new online tools decreases as they grow older, potentially resulting in a decline in engagement in online bullying and abuse (Ranjith et al., 2023; Jaishwal, 2021). In relation to gender, research has indicated that females are high likely susceptible to experiencing cyberbullying, whereas males are more prone to participating in electronic bullying (Walrave & Heirman, 2011; Smith et al., 2008). The reasons provided by teenagers for being targeted for cyberbullying exhibit substantial similarities across major demographic groups, although there exist a few notable distinctions. Notably, teenage girls, as a whole, are more inclined than teenage boys to assert that they have encountered cyberbullying due to their physical appearance (17% versus 11%) or their gender (14% versus 6%).

Conversely, a study conducted in India revealed that boys have a significantly higher likelihood, three and a half times greater, of being both victims and cyberbullying perpetrators compared to their counterpart (Ranjith et al., 2023). Considering the overall prevalence, studies from India showed that Cyberbullying victimization prevalence ranged from 14.5% to 17%, whereas the prevalence rate of cyberbullying perpetration varied from 5.8% to 8% among adolescents (Sharma et al., 2017; Ranjith et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that the prevalence and pattern rates of cyberbullying vary across studies

conducted in various countries. According to Kowalski et al. (2014), this variability may stem from various methods for comprehending and quantifying the construct have also produced inconsistent findings about its prevalence and other features.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

The following section examines the different risk factors and protective factors that have been found in the literature from the viewpoint of both cyberbullying perpetrators and victims.

Risk Factors for Cyberbullying Victimization

It has been noted that females are more susceptible to cyberbullying victimization compared to males (Zhu et al., 2021), which could be attributed to their physical appearance (Vogels, 2022). Furthermore, mental health issues of adolescents including depression, eating disorders, borderline personality disorder, sleep deprivation, suicidal plans, suicidal ideation (Zhu et al., 2021), social anxiety, perceived loneliness, negative self-cognitions, defectiveness, perceived mistrust, anger, negative body image, previous experiences of psychological distress, traditional victimization, traditional bullying, cyberbullying perpetration (Camerini et al., 2020), prior engagement with cyberbullying and risky online behaviour (Walrave & Heirman, 2011).

Additionally, individuals who spend more time online than their peers (Zhu et al., 2021), a lack of effective negative emotion regulation and/or maladaptive emotional expression strategies (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018), low self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998), students classified in the self-derogation profile (Palermi et al., 2022). In relation to educational level students with academic problems and Media related factors such as internet access and use, including lack of internet safety procedures, problematic internet use, social network use or internet addiction. Among environmental factors, problematic family history, including low parental academic attainment and harmful family management, a strained bond between parents and children, parental aggression, disputes with siblings, and previous relationships and dating (Camerini et al., 2020), low affection and low involvement (Kowalski et al., 2014), authoritarian parenting style, Low parental support (Dehue et al., 2012) raises the possibility of becoming victim to cyberbullying over time (Camerini et al., 2020).

Risk Factors for Cyberbullying Perpetration:

A systematic review by Camerini et al. (2020) have identified various factors contribute to the perpetration of cyberbullying, with a complex interplay between psychological, behavioral, and environmental influences. Males tend to exhibit higher tendencies towards engaging in cyberbullying, while a history of traditional bullying, particularly within school settings, significantly predicts future cyberbullying perpetration. Individuals who have been the victims of cyberbullying themselves are more prone to engaging in the perpetration behavior. Psychological factors such as lower levels of social anxiety and the presence of internalizing symptoms like emotion regulation difficulties, depression, anger and anxiety also contribute to the likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying.

Additionally, externalizing problems including aggression, substance use, self-harm, theft and rule-breaking tendencies are linked to cyberbullying perpetration. Attitudes and perceptions, such as favorable attitudes towards cyberbullying, perceived self-control, perceived personal standards, a lack of inhibition moral acceptance of bullying, a sense of behavioral control, invisibility online, and diminished levels of control over oneself and confidence in avoiding detection, play significant roles (Camerini et al., 2020). Media and online behavior, problematic family backgrounds, peer influences, and parenting styles also influence the cyberbullying perpetration (Camerini et al., 2020; Sticca et al, 2013; Walrave & Heirman, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2014; Dehue et al., 2012).

Protective Factors

Numerous protective variables that reduce the likelihood of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration among adolescents have been found in the research. High emotional intelligence, cognitive empathy abilities, Intimate parent-child relationships, authoritative parental styles, Cohesive family environments (Healy et al 2015; Morcillo et al., 2015). Perceived peer support, positive peer attachment styles (Kim et al., 2017), resilience (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017). Emotion control plays a crucial role in buffering against cyberbullying (Hemphill et al., 2015; Hemphill & Heerde, 2014). Within the school context, a favourable school environment, encompassing perceived fairness, resource distribution equity, interpersonal relationship with other students, and teacher, serves as a protective shield against cyberbullying victimization & perpetration (Camerini et al., 2020).

Consequences of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying significantly affects adolescents, compromising their personal privacy and leading to the emergence of psychological disorders (Zhu et al., 2021), with its potential impact of cyberbullying surpasses that of conventional bullying as it allows perpetrators to maintain anonymity and effortlessly establish connections with children and adolescents at any time (Hutson et al., 2018). Further, research indicates that even minimal experiences of cyberbullying victimization heighten the risk of developing future mental health issues (Fahy et al., 2016). According to the results of an Indian study, it was determined that 61% of adolescents exhibited increased mental and behavioural issues such as behavioural issues, problems with peer, hyperactivity, retaliation, feeling of helplessness and emotional issues (Ranjith et al., 2023). Adolescents who have experienced cyberbullying exhibit a wide range of emotional reactions, including frustration, anger, sadness, worry, stress, fear, and upset (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Ortega et al., 2012). These emotional responses vary in intensity and quality (Bottino, 2015). Another study reported that, adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were found to have a 2.07-fold increased likelihood of displaying depressive symptoms and a 2.5-fold higher tendency towards having suicidal thoughts in comparison to their peers who did not subject to victims of cyberbullying (Maurya et al., 2022).

Few studies have highlighted those victims of cyberbullying often experience problematic relationships with their parents (Katzer et al., 2009), exhibit difficulties concentrating at school (Beran & Li, 2005), report lower levels of self-esteem, engage in substance use, suicidal attempts, experience psychosomatic problems, encounter social difficulties, and express feelings of not being safe or cared for in school (Bottino, 2015; Beran & Li, 2005; Palermi et al., 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Feeling helpless and powerless in the face of cyberbullying activities can exacerbate sense of anxiety & emotional turmoil, potentially leading to the emergence of depressive symptoms (Bottino, 2015). In addition, it has come to attention that sharing information about an individual that they wish to keep private can have severe consequences on their reputation, leading to public humiliation, strained friendships, and a negative impact on their social standing. This is especially true during the adolescent years, as the social circle greatly influences the formation of one's identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

Furthermore, it's not only victims of cyberbullying who are at risk of mental health issues; adolescents involved in cyberbullying perpetration are also susceptible to experiencing psychological challenges. Previous research supports the notion that adolescents engaged in cyberbullying exhibit depression, low self-esteem, anxiety (Kowalski & Limber, 2013) a

spectrum of behavioural issues, including conduct problems, drug use, antagonism towards individuals in positions of power, violent and unlawful behaviours, emotional problems, hyperactivity, peer difficulties, and a lack of prosocial behaviour (Rakic et al., 2021; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Maurya et al., 2022). Furthermore, school-related issues such as referrals for discipline, suspensions both within and outside of schools (Wright, 2015), school absences, leaving school due to illness, and grades are also correlated with engagement in cyberbullying behavior (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). This underscores the significant association between cyberbullying perpetration and various psychological and academic challenges. The negative impacts of cyberbullying, such as compromised safety, decreased academic achievement, deteriorated mental well-being, and heightened distress, prompted UNICEF to declare that "no child is completely secure in the online realm" (UNICEF, 2017; Zhu et al., 2021).

Treatment and Prevention Approaches

To effectively address cyberbullying, it requires a collaborative effort among individuals, parents, schools, and communities to create a safe online environment and protect children and adolescents from its harmful impacts (Zhu et al., 2021).

The primary emphasis of the intervention should be on identifying the factors that contribute to cyberbullying and raising awareness about it. Additionally, it is essential to educate adolescents about the detection of potential risks in the virtual realm, the consequences and impact of cyberbullying is equally significant to address this issue effectively (Ranjith et al., 2013).

Utilizing the psychoeducation model can be beneficial in achieving this objective by providing structured education and information to adolescents about cyberbullying, its effects, and strategies for prevention and intervention.

Chillemi et al., (2020) research findings indicates that an internet-based, self-directed psychoeducational program rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy led to enhanced comprehension of coping mechanisms among adolescents, particularly those relevant to cyberbullying. The study also revealed IRCB (Increasing Resiliency to Cyberbullying) program was effective in increasing inclination among adolescents to effectively apply coping strategies such as self-compassion and challenging negative thoughts when faced with cyberbullying incidents. Smith and colleagues (2008) have reported that while some conventional approaches to addressing bullying can also be effective in dealing with cyberbullying, such as implementing curriculum-based initiatives and fostering peer support.

Additionally, targeted interventions that focus on practical measures like contacting mobile phone companies and internet service providers, as well as understanding legal rights

in relation to these issues, can prove beneficial. In light of the finding that only 9% of victims reported their victimization to a teacher or adult (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), it indicates a need for interventions to encourage and facilitate reporting. Possible interventions could include implementing anonymous reporting systems, providing education and awareness programs about the importance of reporting, fostering trusting relationships between students and teachers, and ensuring that there are supportive mechanisms in place for victims who come forward. Additionally, creating a safe and non-judgmental environment where victims feel comfortable disclosing their experiences is crucial in increasing reporting rates (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2017).

Additionally, adaptive resilience and a positive appraisal of a challenging circumstance or personal attributes such as self-esteem and self-efficacy have the potential to reduce the psychological harm experienced by victims (Bottino, 2015). In order to decrease the prevalence of cyberbullying offenders, it is essential to foster the capacity for emotional self-regulation by providing suitable emotional management instruction. Additionally, educators, counsellors, and caregivers must possess adequate understanding of emotional management and enhance their emotional management competencies and proficiencies (Ortega et al., 2012).

Research indicates that individuals who fall victim to cyberbullying may employ specific technological tactics to combat such issues, such as blocking the cyberbully's account, reporting the abuse to the website's administrator, and taking a temporary break from online activities (Ranjith et al., 2013; Lapidot-lefler & Barak, 2012; Pieschl et al., 2013; Razjouyan et al., 2018). As highlighted earlier in this paper, cyberbullying is prevalent among adolescents and has significant negative impacts on their mental health.

Therefore, it is imperative to incorporate cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies across all grade levels to adequately tackle this problem (Beran & Li, 2005). Moreover, interventions should begin at an early age, typically around 10 years old (Razjouyan et al., 2018).

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