



Cyberbullying: A Primer

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DOI: [10.23956/ijarcsse/V7I3/01316](https://doi.org/10.23956/ijarcsse/V7I3/01316)

Abstract: *Cyberbullying refers to a form of harassment that occurs online. Online bullying activities are common among adolescents and minors. It ranges from false accusations to obscenities. Its impact on the victim may include fear, depression, sadness, suicidal thought, embarrassment, trauma, helplessness, and worry. Cyberbullying can be prevented through the joint effort of students, parents, teachers, and the governments. It can be detected using some algorithms. This paper presents a short primer on cyberbullying.*

Keywords: *bullying, cyberbullying, electronic bullying, cyberspace harassment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Children are using the Internet more than ever before and it is becoming an essential part of their social life. Their presence online without adult supervision can lead to negative online experiences and risky behaviors such as exposure to pornography, drugs, violence, and cyber bullying. News about children getting involved in cyberbullying is becoming rampant these days.

Bullying is a form of harassment with the intent to harm. It is an aggressive act carried out by an individual or a group against a victim who may not be able to defend himself or herself. Traditional forms of bullying may include spreading lies and rumors, exposing secrets, punching, and threatening physical harm. It tends to be more insidious if it comes over time.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is an aggressive, intentional behavior carried out by an individual or group using electronic technology. It is becoming common among teenagers. It is carried by publishing false information with the intent of defaming, coercing, humiliating, belittling, discrediting, insulting, ridiculing, embarrassing, backstabbing, death threats, stalking, or damaging reputation. It may entail a threat to the safety of the victim [1]. Tech-savvy students are taking advantage of the Internet and cell phones to bully their peers. The reason why they bully includes breakup in relationships (between boyfriends and girlfriends), rejection, retaliation/vengeance, and desire to harm relationships. It has been noted that cyberbullying is worse than traditional offline bullying, because it can be carried out anonymously and can reach multiple victims simultaneously.

Cyberbullying occurs through the use of electronic technologies such as computers, tablets, or cell phones. It may take the form of hate mail, instant messaging, or online gaming. It can take place on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

It is experienced more out of school than in school since most schools restrict the use of Internet and mobile phone within school premises [2]. The effects of cyberbullying can be devastating, leaving the victim angry, helpless, depressed, or suicidal. Children who are cyberbullied may have low self-esteem, avoid school, get poor grades, and use drugs and alcohol.

Cyberbullying is not restricted to sex or age and many cyberbullies are “virtually” anonymous. Students in elementary schools may experience more cyberbullying than students in high schools. Cyberbullying has emerged rapidly in the youth culture and has also reached college and university students and workplace [3]. While majority of cyberbullies are male, majority of cybervictims or targets are females. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, anytime.

III. PREVENTING CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is regarded as a real significant social problem because it produces harm on the victim. Preventing it in school and online should be the joint effort of students, parents, teachers, and the governments. They should all have a basic knowledge of cyberbullying so that they can prevent it [4].

Students should not give away personal information such PIN number, social security number, phone number, etc. Victims of cyberbullying should not reply messages from the bullying person, save the evidence of the bullying, report threats of harm, prevent communication from the cyberbully, and seek help from parents and teachers. They may also change their email accounts.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that adults protect children from violence, abuse, or injury. The parents protect their children by monitoring what they do online. They can block any cyberbully

and set limit on Internet access. They can educate their children on cyber ethics and the law. This will help the children to become responsible digital citizens.

Combating cyberbullying is more difficult for school administrators because of the anonymity associated with the electronic tools. Educators, particularly school principals, should be provided training on cyberbullying. Although most cyberbully takes place outside school, cyberbullying affects students' performance in school. Starting from elementary schools, schools should develop and enforce policies on using Internet. These policies should include zero tolerance on cyberbullying [5]. They should set clear rules and consequences. They can also provide awareness of cyberbullying and its impact on students [6].

Federal authorities usually lead the way when it comes to enforcing laws against cybercrime. Several actions have been taken by governments and institutions to prevent or minimize cyberbullying. Their goal is to increase acceptable online behavior and to reduce online aggression. Governments can use a number of policy instruments such as law, education, and awareness campaigns to address cyberbullying. In some countries, there are no particular laws dealing with cyberbullying. Cyberbullying offences are treated with other criminal laws at the state level. Governments should encourage social media such as Facebook and Twitter to set anti-bullying policies and report cyberbullying [7]. Some question whether it is possible to legislate moral behavior in cyberspace. Some also see the role of spiritual faith can play in handling cyberbullying [8].

IV. DETECTING CYBERBULLYING

Detecting cyberbullying is a complementary approach to preventing it. This attempts to minimize the amount of occurrences of cyberbullying in the long term. (Internet filtering and packet sniffing are not effective in reducing access to websites.) Several approaches have been proposed for detecting cyberbullying.

One approach involves three steps [9, 10]:

- Obtain data from various online networks like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Process the data and label messages that are likely instances of bullying.
- Filter or remove and report those suspected messages. Classify messages into positive or negative instances of cyberbullying using various algorithms.

Another approach can be used to detect various violations. The normative agents are present in the cyber space and continuously monitor the behavior of the visitors, and apply punishments and rewards to influence their behavior [11]. Many organizations provide resources on how to prevent and detect cyberbullying. Most of those resources are available at [12].

V. CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying is a new growing phenomenon in the digital age and research on it is limited and descriptive. It is a worldwide anti-social online behavior of misusing technology to harass others and cause psychological harm. It is gaining ground worldwide, especially in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan, and other parts of the world, where Internet and cell phones are embedded in youth culture. The World Health Organization has noted cyberbullying as a major, international public health issue.

Cyberbullying is different from traditional or face-to-face bullying in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the way information is distributed to the cybervictims. It can take the form of threats, harassment, humiliation, or sending degrading messages, photos, or videos. It has a significant, negative impact on children and teenagers. It should be regarded as a contemporary cultural challenge children face as they transition into adulthood [13]. While the governments at federal and state levels should make some legislative measures, education and awareness programs will help in reducing cyberbullying.

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