

CYBERBULLYING: PERCEPTIONS, EFFECTS AND BEHAVIOURS AMONG TEENAGERS



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates teenagers, specifically students', opinions and attitudes linked with cyberbullying. Specifically, it examines whether cyberbullying is associated with teenagers strongly than other age groups, and whether extensive use of social media moderates it. It further goes on to investigate the outcomes of cyberbullying and the reasons behind underreporting of cyberbullying. Web based surveys were used to facilitate cyberbullying victims wanting not to reveal their identity. Various themes and constructs were revealed that were initially not predicted by the research group, thus making it a highly useful exploratory study. It was also revealed that more than 60% of cyberbullying victims chose not to report the incidents, even to their parents/ elders or the school administration.

Key Words: Cyberbullying, social media use, Teenagers, Perception, Attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying has arguable been a part of human nature, and has found new dimensions through internet and social media (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Cyberbullying is dissimilar from traditional bullying because of the fact that it involves bullying someone by the use of electronic means. Specifically, it is bullying through the internet or social media and it includes the use of information and interaction tools that encourage deliberate, unreceptive, and frequently recurring actions by a person or a group that is premeditated to upset other people. Though it is possible that anyone can be a victim of cyberbullying, teenage and specifically, students are more likely to be its target. According to Willard (2006), many types of cyberbullying occur. Types of cyberbullying include, provocation, disparagement, masquerade, deception, segregation, cyber stalking, and cyber terrorizations. (Bauman, 2015). Victims of cyberbullying are more likely to not report it to anyone including their

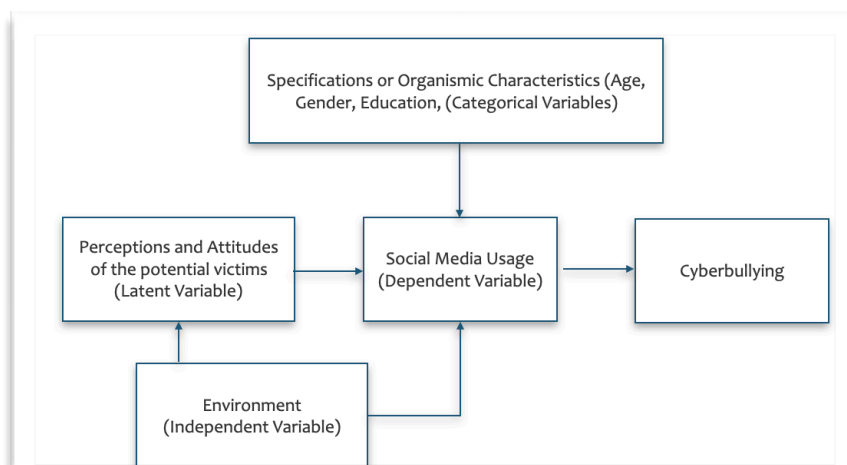
parents and any agency. Because sometimes, they feel scared that if they report it to anyone then bullying becomes more worse and they feel that they have to deal with it alone. They feel that if they share this with their parents then may be their social media privileges will be decreased or will be taken away. Victim of cyberbullying feels low self esteem, stress, anxiety, depression, anger, ashamed, fear, loneliness, sad and embarrassment. It has been come to know that victims of cyberbullying may also face extreme impacts such as suicide and mental illness. A term linked with cyberbullying is bullycide, which results in suicide of victims of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Putchin, 2010)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying is an action of bullying that is different from traditional bullying and that has many forms. It involves sending messages to harass someone, posting such pictures or videos about someone that can embarrass him or her, posting unpleasant comments about someone, bullying someone through emails or text messages or by using social networking sites or any other form of bullying. Cyberbullying is described as any action or any performance that can harass someone or hurt someone by using internet.(Walrave & Heriman, 2011). It can happen on electronic media such as mobile phones, emails, messages, chat rooms or social networking sites. The most common forms of cyberbullying are : to send messages that can harass someone or threatening on the victim's social media profile, posting offensive or discomfoting pictures or videos of someone on social media.(Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014). Cyberbullying on social networking site is engaging as it can be done both openly and secretly. Dredge, Gleeson and de Piedad Garcia (2014) found that these two methods are almost equivalent to repeated use.

Based on the existing literature and observable social trends, this paper sets out the following hypotheses:

1. Teenagers are affected more by cyberbullies compared to other age groups. The younger the teenager (early high school), the more likely he/she is to be affected.
2. A teenager's social media usage and aptitude affects their cyberbullying perceptions and behaviors.



The variables used to measure the constructs set above include Social media usage (degree of use of social media of teenagers), Perception and attitude of the potential victims and Specification (Age, gender, education).

The figure given above outlines the relationships between the variables and thus gives thus study its opening/ starting research/ theoretical framework. Being an exploratory study, it is expected the framework will be enriched not only through the instant research but also future researches that can make use of this paper.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The variables were defined and measured as follows:

Social Media and Usage: Number of hours of use of predefined social media platforms (Facebook, WhasApp, Instagram, Others). The data was segregated by the age of the teenager (pre-high school, high school, some college, college grad)

Perception and Attitude: Reaction towards a stimulus (positive or negative) moderated by self image and social perception.

Organismic: Age, Gender, Education level.

Environment: Conditions influencing causation and aggravation/ otherwise of a problem. Environmental forces shape perception and attitude which leads towards social media usage - defined through acceptability of social facts, existing relationship with friends and existing relationship with family.

A Web based survey was used to collect the data. The decision was based on an initial exercise aimed at finding the validity and reliability of various survey and sampling methods, keeping forth the particular nature of this research. Web based survey was found to be most useful considering the generally unfavourable attitude of respondents towards revealing their identity.

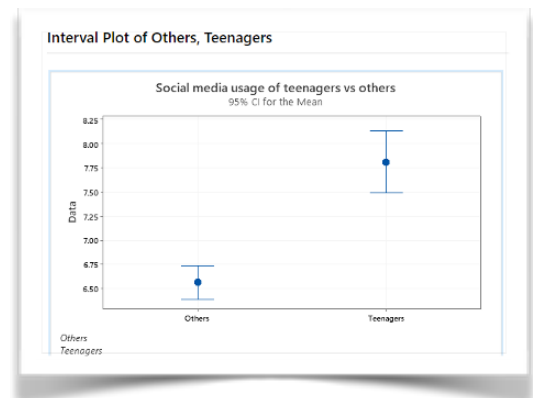
Random sampling method was used, followed by judgemental sampling. The respondents were clustered on the basis of age, education, residential area (urban/ rural).

A total of 101 usable responses were obtained. 63 of the respondents were females while 38 were males.

Validity and reliability of the research were established initially through expert opinions (Face Validity), with led to significant changes in the measurement scales and tools. Later the reliability was triangulated through test-retest and cronbach's alpha statistic of a 10 sample pilot study (0.76).

RESULTS

A two sample t-test was used to establish the difference of likelihood of being cyberbullied between teenagers and other age groups. The test yielded a T value of -9.96 and p value of 0.000, thus clearly establishing teenagers are the more likely victims of cyberbullying. Individual value plots showed no overlaps between teenagers and others.



Potential victims reported a large spectrum of behaviours in identifying behaviour that amount to cyberbullying. While explicit acts such as abusive language and content was identified as cyberbullying, many subtly acts such as unpleasant comments were not clearly identified. A small percentage (>10%) of victims chose to engage the bully and express their concern, which worked evenly (~50%) while most victims either chose to ignore the events (44%) or avoid the bully (48%) through blocking (37%), changing their own accounts/ IDs (35%), removing from friends list (21%).

Almost all respondents felt stressed by the event, many reported anger (86%) and thus avoidance of interaction with the bully (64%), loneliness (54%), low self esteem (45%) and self blaming (21%).

However, more than 60% of the teenagers having experienced multiple cyberbullying attacks chose not to discuss it with their family members or elders. Most teenagers did this to preserve their freedom to access and use their electronic devices, social interactions such as meeting friends in groups. Some teenagers decided not to report in order to keep their relationships with family members/ elders cordial. Of those who did discuss, more than 80% discussed it first with family and then with their school management. Some of the teenagers (<10%) discussed the incidents with their close friends resulting in social support. Only 7% of the respondents considered reporting the act to police, while only 2% actually reported it. The respondents who did not engage the bully, their elders or school management tend to believe that cyberbullying cannot be helped and has to be lived with (they believed it does not hurt them anymore).

CONCLUSION

Social media usage of teenagers and others are compared with each other and according to results it has been come to know that that social media usage of teenagers is more than others. So, they are more tend to effect from cyberbullying. According to questionnaire results, mostly people faced cyberbullying in their teenage, but they don't find a proper platform where they can report. At present, no formal forum exists where a victim of cyberbullying can report the incident. Even where such forums exist, teenagers do not know exactly y whom to report about this issue. It is also perceived that even if such forums existed and the cases were reported, the proceedings and outcomes of such reporting would be more painful than being the victims of cyberbullying itself.

Most victims agreed that if they were given assurance/ confidence of not revealing their identity and personal details (social media related), they would report and follow cyberbullying incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teenagers specifically Students, a key group in struggling cyberbullying, acquired to understand accountabilities linked with technology usage. Results reveal that cyberbullying becomes more dominant as teenagers spend a huge aggregate of time using social media. They are required to understand all the results that they have to face if they ever misuse technology and specifically social media. They have to recognize the hazards that are related to technology and also significance of receiving assistance from sensible students friends and adults, when anything related to cyberbullying happen. While telling about their cyberbullying incidents ,students should know that they have to be determined to be sure that adult students understand the importance of the cases.

FUTURE WORK

This research can be built upon in several ways. Some of the areas that can be researched in details and others that constitute extensions are as follows:

- Replication of research in other areas and environments/ cultures.
- Researches based on more social media platforms.
- Researches into the psychological aspects that lead to committing cyberbullying and being silent victims of it.

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