The E-demon of Cyberbullying among Teens

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of cyberbullying among teens. The main purpose is to understand the problems encountered by adolescents due to cyberbullying and how the victim and others can play a key role in this combat. The paper also focuses on how cyberbullying is different from the conventional bullying and mentions the practices that can be taken up to prevent and minimise incidents involving cyberbullying. Opportunities for future research in this area are also outlined.

INTRODUCTION

Engrossed in the virtual world, disregard the real. Today, we communication through hands has surpassed our mouths, tapping keyboards and touchpads provide route to our thoughts. Our offline life has become an active part of the online universe. This is the way we communicate in the 21st century. Right from checking the scores of a cricket game during office hours, to getting the delivery of your favourite pizza in time and even to get information about a school project, our lives revolve around the use of the Internet. Neuroscience research has begun to examine how this technologically driven communication is altering our brain. These studies have found that the brain of individuals who spend a lot of time on the Internet resembles those of drug addicts in significant ways. Every time an individual responds to the ping of an instant message or text message, a small amount of dopamine is secreted in the brain

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as a reward, similar being under the influence of drugs (Dokoupil, 2012). Consequently, humans are becoming addicted to these rewarding pings, just as an addict gets a high with every dose of drug. This has hampered our normal socialisation process wherein, now we spend more time on the Internet than being face-to-face with family and friends.

Internet has become a nearly indispensable tool used in business, education, government and in the entertainment world (Smith, 2008). This reliance on Internet and its services has not only influenced the adult lives but has also influenced the daily lives and activities of our children. Today, growing up for a child is very different from his parents, children and young people are able to use and understand technology and can communicate with greater ease and sophistication (Agatston, Kowalski and Limber, 2007). Methods of technology such as text messaging and social network sites have refined the meaning of social interactions for adolescents (Rivers and Noret, 2009).

Historian Howard Segal suggests that all technological developments are mixed blessings, presenting us with tremendous benefits, as well as unexpected burdens (Hoff and Mitchell, 2009). Campbell (2005) states that there is a 'dark side' to using technology as it can be used to harm others. It is possible, because of the lack of ownership of social networking sites, for people to set up an account and create fake profiles of themselves or others. Research into the field of actual and potential harm that technology can cause is largely in its investigation stage since the growing trend of young people using it to interact is relatively recent (Smith et al., 2008).

The popularity of these new adolescent communication tools has created some new challenges as well as some negative adolescent behaviour. Traditional bullying persists but middle and high schools are now facing the explosion of communication electronic and technologies which has brought to young people a new means of bullying called cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying — An E-route for Traditional Bullying

'Cyberbullying' is a term first used and defined by Canadian educator Bill Belsey around the turn of the millennium (Campbell, 2005). Belsey defines it as "the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (Butler, Campbell and Kift, 2008). Belsey's definition of cyberbullying is widely used in academic and government literature (Li, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; DCSF, 2009).

Bullying that takes place in cyberspace, in the virtual social sphere, is sometimes much more powerful than the conventional bullying that occurs in and around school, due to the Internet's unique

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Aspect	Characteristics
Wide audience	Through the circulation of video clips on the Internet, although the bully may not be aware of the audience's reactions.
Anonymity	Cyberbullies are relatively protected by the anonymity of electronic forms of contact, which can safeguard them from punishment or retaliation.
Total access	Students who are victimised have no place to hide, and can be targeted anytime and at any place.
Complex roles	Individuals often play multiple roles at once, such as cyberbully, target and observer.
Lack of immediate gratification	Students who cyberbully do not usually see the response of the victim, changing the satisfaction or inhibition normally generated by traditional bullying.

Table 1Characteristics of Cyberbullying

features (Huang and Chou, 2010). It can be more devastating than traditional forms of bullying due to the much larger audience online (Strom and Strom, 2005) and because children now cannot even escape their bullies by going home to a safe environment. Several characteristics distinguish cyberbullying from conventional bullying. Table 1 shows the characteristics of cyberbullying.

THE DYNAMICS OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying entails a systematic abuse of power, through information and communication technology (ICT) by the cyberbully. A cyberbully is someone who uses technology to harass, embarrass, intimidate or stalk someone else. One instance of cyberbullying is enough to generate an immediate snowball effect that can be unstoppable because it is controlled through technology (Slonje, Smith and Frisén, 2013). As represented 1. episode in Figure an of cyberbullying would usually have a bully (perpetrator), a victim (target) and observers who can stay silent and perpetuate the bullying by being bystanders or they can act to stop cyberbullying and become upstanders. The phenomenon of cyberbullying cannot be fully understood without addressing all of these groups and their combinations.

Anyone can become a victim of cyberbullying. Girls and boys appear to be equally likely to be sufferers of harassment done online. Some people who become cyber bullies may be the victims of bullying and are taking out their anger and frustration in cyberspace.

The third piece of the cyberbully puzzle is an observer who can play

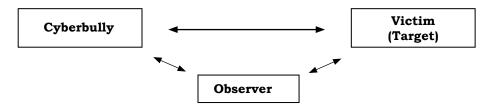


Figure 1. Individuals involved in cyberbullying

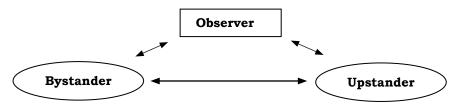


Figure 2. Duality in the role of an observer

dual role depending on the choice she or he makes, as seen in Figure 2. An observer chooses to be a bystander when she/he witnesses cyberbullying happening, but does nothing to help the victim. Some bystanders also might get involved in the bullying, and spread the disaster further by recruiting even more bystanders and in turn developing themselves into cyberbullies.

Opposite to a bystander is an upstander. When an observer begins to feel a sense of empathy about the injustice the person is witnessing and takes action, the person becomes an upstander. These are individuals who do something that prevents or reduces the bullying they see, or come to the aid of another child who is being bullied.

Impact of Cyberbullying on Teens

Cyberbullying can impact youth in a harmful way. Almost 30 per cent of adolescents reported they were victims of online bullying, meaning they were ignored, disrespected, called names, threatened, picked on, made fun of, or had rumours spread about them to others (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). Life in cyberspace is often intertwined with life in the real world. In other words, what all happens during the day is thrashed out online at night and what takes place online at night is often discussed during the day, so cyberbullying as defined above, spreads like wildfire at school (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006). It is plausible that loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, depression, anger, frustration and

public humiliation could definitely be possible responses to cyberbullying (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Sontag et al., 2011).

A study published by The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), quotes that one in every four Indian teenagers has been a victim of cyberbullying (The Times of India, 2014). Bangalore-based psychiatrist, Aruna Sikdar in her interview with The Times of India (2014) has mentioned that cyberbullying is one of the main reasons behind the increasing rate of teen suicide in India. "It not only undermines the child's confidence but also affects his or her psyche. In most cases, the child becomes very timid and selfconscious," she informs.

Older teens seem more likely to be involved than younger teens. Tokunaga (2010) argues that, despite inconsistencies in data, literature indicates the greatest number of incidents occurring cyberbullying from 13 to 15 years of age (Burton and Mutongwizo, 2009; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Kowalski and Limber, 2007; Von Solms and deLange, 2011; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008). Hacking, publication of obscene content and banking frauds among other cyber crimes have registered an annual increase of more than 40 per cent in the country. According to Home Ministry statistics, as many as 71,780 cyber frauds were reported in the year 2013, while 22,060 such cases were reported in 2012 (IBNLive, 2014). Concerned over 40 per cent annual increase in cyber crimes, the government wants to take steps towards a secure and safe cyberspace.

Children are often victims of cyber crime right in their homes. On an average, five cases of cyber crime and sex are reported in metropolitan Dr Purnima Nagraia. cities. psychiatrist says, "victim of such crimes usually suffers a lengthy psychotic episode and is unable to normalise". She adds, thousands of teenagers are trapped through cyber sex. Your child who is 10 inch away from you on the Net can be a victim. There are above 4,50,000 porn sites in the world of which 1,73,000 are Indian. If one does not use it safely, it can turn into a dangerous or death trap.

Studies and research bv Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011), has evidences suggesting that victims of cyberbullying suffer prolonged emotional or behavioural difficulties prior to and during victimisation. Victims seem to report similar feelings as victims of traditional bullving. such as depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, social anxiety and alienation. As the frequency increases, Ybarra and Mitchell (2007) report that mental health problems increase. These equate to depressive symptoms, anxiety. excessive psychosomatic symptoms and increased substance abuse. Ybarra. **Diener-West** and Leaf (2007) conducted a study where almost two out of every five (39%) reported emotional distress as a result.

Patchin and Hinduja (2010) reported that victims tend to have lower selfesteem. Of vouth who had been harassed online, almost one-third (32%) reported at least one symptom of stress as a result of the incident. Furthermore, 31 per cent reported being extremely upset, 19 per cent were very or extremely afraid, and 18 per cent were very or extremely embarrassed by the harassment (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) reported that cyberbullying is causing students to experience feelings of anger, powerlessness, fear and sadness, similar to traditional bullying.

In addition to the personal responses to bullying, victimisation can also affect a student's ability to learn at school (Hoff and Mitchell, 2009). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) suggest victims of cyberbullying may be at risk for other negative developmental and behavioural consequences, including school violence and delinquency. School behaviour problems including ditching school, bringing weapons, detentions and suspensions are significantly more frequently reported by youth harassed online (Ybarra et al., 2007)

Cyberbullying has raised concerns as it has also been linked to cases of suicide (Brown, Jackson and Cassidy, 2006; Patchin and Hinduja, 2010). For example, in 2014, a 17-yearold girl from Kolkata, India, killed herself following a cyberbullying attack, where one of her friends uploaded a morphed picture of her on a social networking site. In another incident, an Indian-origin boy in UK committed suicide after cyberbullying by classmates in November, 2016 (India Today, 2016). The electronic nature makes it less likely to attract the attention of parents and school personnel and, moreover, victims may have a more difficult time gaining a reprieve from the cyberbully, given the fact the students can be exposed even when physically removed from bully. Kowalski and Limber the (2007) stated that, "the enemy we know is often less frightening than the enemy we do not know" (p. 28). Victims feel helpless because they are not equipped to handle the bullying and do not know what to do to make it stop. They generally do not seek help because of the fear of retribution or embarrassment and they assume adults will not act (Hoff and Mitchell, 2009). The victims who choose to fight back generally wait until the bullying reaches an intolerable level and becomes very dangerous for both the victim and the bully (Hoff and Mitchell, 2009). Social acceptance is critically important for adolescents' identity and self-esteem and cvberbullving can possibly result in permanent psychological, emotional and social issues (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006).

A Call for Safety

Unfortunately, there is no magical pill that will protect all adolescents from cyberbullying, but there are steps that can be taken to reduce its frequency and impact (Patchin and Hinduja, 2009). Given the fact that the majority of teens do not feel that adults are capable of stopping cyberbullying from occurring, educators need to begin by communicating an awareness of the problem, a willingness to help, and by showing some action and fostering the self-esteem of youth (Feinberg and Robey, 2009; Cassidy, Jackson and Brown, 2009). Schools are not able to reasonably solve the problem by merely blocking all access to technology, so such an approach would not be an appropriate course of action (Brown et al. Cassidy, and Jackson, 2006; Patchin and Hinduja, 2009). Instead, it is recommended that schools take a proactive, educational approach towards dealing with cyberbullying. It is not necessarily a lost cause to provide Internet education to juniors or seniors in high school, but since students begin exploring life online around the 6th or 7th grade, Internet education needs to begin at a very early age (Patchin Hinduja, 2009; Dowell, Burgess and Cavanaugh, 2009).

Some studies have suggested that setting up anonymous means of reporting and punishing aggressors are effective, but providing education remains the key factor in reducing the prevalence of cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2009; Patchin and Hinduja, 2009; Dowell et al., 2009). Beran and Li (2007) assert that cyberbullying intervention plans require the efforts November 2017

of administration, teachers, students, parents and community members alike. Students should be exposed to a climate that actively identifies cyberbullying as a behaviour that is not tolerated, and they should be exposed to curricular enhancements and assembly programmes that support the school's belief towards appropriate use of technology (Patchin and Hinduja, 2009). An aspect of this recommended initiative for schools to remember is to teach students how to respond to experiences when they do not have school personnel who can immediately provide them with assistance. Since students will eventually be exposed to inappropriate content at some point while online, it makes sense to provide them with the tools to properly address those situations before they occur (Patchin and Hinduja, 2009). Some popular strategies that students have identified include blocking instant messages, changing e-mail addresses, changing phone numbers, ignoring minor instances, not responding to the bully, and logging all evidence of bullying (Smith et al., 2008; Patchin and Hinduja, 2009; Feinberg and Robey, 2009).

An additional suggestion is to identify student leaders who can provide peer mentoring where they teach younger students about reacting to and preventing cyberbullying. According to Diamanduros, Downs and Jenkins (2008), "it is important for parents and teachers to educate The E-demon of Cyberbullying among Teens

their children about the impact that online chats, instant messaging, text messaging and social networking sites, such as MySpace, can have on their social lives".

Both schools and homes should create online agreements or contracts for computer use, with input from students. Make sure your agreement contains clear rules about ethical online behaviour. Research has shown that bullying rates drop when kids know that it is against the rules and how to report it (Tannenbaum, 2010). Some of the strategies are discussed as follows—

- Students who visit games sites, rules should deal with online interactions—should never provide personal information.
- Do not share passwords with friends.
- Never post or say anything on the Internet that you would not want the whole world including your parents to read.
- Reach out to an adult at the first sign of a threat.
- What goes on online is everyone's business. The action must be taken when cyberbullying is encountered. Not reporting it is equivalent to approving it.
- Popular sites like Facebook and YouTube provide tools to report inappropriate content, and the 'comments' features associated with individual pages can provide opportunities for witnesses to speak out.

For the victim

- **Do not fight back**: A lot of times bullies are looking to get a rise out of their target, and fighting back just gives them what they want.
- Save the evidence: Make sure you have a record of what happened if somebody is mean to you online. If it is something that was sent directly to you, make sure you save it. If it is something that can be deleted (a tweet, a status update, etc.), get a screenshot (http://www.take-a-screenshot. org/).
- **Report it**: Talk to somebody. If there's no one you can talk at home, then approach your school teachers or counsellors.
- Being cyber bullied is not your fault: Most of the victims go on a guilt trip and stress themselves as they start believing that they are the sole reason for getting cyber bullied.

Opportunities for Further Research

It is apparent that cyberbullying has negative effects on victims' emotions, but no research has been found that considers the relationship between attendance, academic performance being а cyber victim. and Bv considering these relationships, а better understanding of the effects and impacts of cyberbullying can be gained. Content analysis on what cyberbullying messages actually say, and not merely what effect they have on the victim, would be useful in order 152 Journal of Indian Education

to understand the mindset of the bully and to raise awareness amongst students about specific instances of cyberbullying, which can lead to a greater understanding of its causes. Furthermore, the findings of these studies can be used in framing policies and programmes. A disparity between what students say they will do and what they actually do has been highlighted in few researches, the reasons for the disparity have not been considered and could be a topic of research. These suggestions demonstrate a significant amount of research is yet to be completed in this field, further illustrating the infancy and lack of width in cyberbullying studies, especially in the Indian context.

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