



## The More Digital Media It Is, The More Severe It Will Be” Student’s Perception About Cyber Bullying

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### ABSTRACT

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In today's increasingly digital world, cyberbullying is a large concern amongst students. The objective of the current study was to explore the perception of cyberbullying among university students, focusing on their awareness, attitude, experiences, and the psychological impact of online bullying. The current study was conducted at the University of Sargodha. The nature of the study was qualitative research. The data was collected from 20 respondents through in-depth interviews. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis using formal coding. The results revealed that excessive use of mobile phones, social media, awareness of many social apps, co-education, sharing contacts, and modernism were the main reasons for cyberbullying. The study also indicated that girls were more victimized than boys. To conclude, the researchers suggested that universities and governmental institutions should take steps to formulate policies regarding cyberbullying. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of creating awareness programs and workshops to educate students about the risks and consequences of cyberbullying. It emphasized the need for effective communication between students, parents, and faculty members to identify and address incidents of cyberbullying promptly. The research also recommended incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum to help students navigate online spaces responsibly and develop empathy toward their peers. This approach could foster a safer online environment and reduce the prevalence of cyberbullying in educational institutions.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The strong negative effects of the modern phenomena of cyberbullying (CB) and cyber-victimization have received attention on a global scale (CV). The definition of CB is typically aggression that is purposefully and repeatedly used in an electronic context (such as e-mail, blogs, instant messages, and text messages) against a person who is exposed (Smith and Livingstone, 2018). Adolescence is a crucial time for healthy development because it marks the point in human development where children transition into adulthood. They can communicate at any moment thanks to the Internet. They use the Internet more frequently (Sticca&Perren, 2013). Additionally, some academics have proposed that cyberbullying may be more harmful than traditional bullying due to the possibility of a large audience, anonymity, virtually unlimited access to victims, and lower levels of supervision (Bonanno&Hymel, 2013).

Cyber bullying may be an "overrated phenomenon," according to Olweus et al., (2012) argument. Additionally, Olweus discovered that traditional bullying had a stronger predictive power for bad consequences than cyber bullying when traditional bullying and cyberbullying were statistically modeled together. Nowadays, practically all forms of communication rely on online technology, which might encourage negative or hazardous behaviors. Cyberbullying is a key example of these damaging or harmful practices. According to research, cyberbullying is distinguished from traditional forms of bullying by a shift to online forms via social media platforms (Li, 2007). Because of the availability of online communication and the development of new bullying dynamics, schools are under more strain and face more difficulties (Green et al. 2017; Stewart and Fritsch 2011).

Bullying is described as persistent, aggressive behavior with the goal of inflicting harm on another that also entails a power disparity (Olweus, 1994). Bullying happens often in schools both domestically and abroad, according to more than 40 years of research. Teenagers who are bullied miss more school (Kochenderfer& Ladd, 1997), exhibit indicators of lower academic achievement (Nakamoto& Schwartz, 2010), and report feelings of isolation (Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman, & Eden, 2012), poor health (Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, &Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006), as well as higher levels of anxiety and depression. Studies have shown a substantial correlation between the frequency of bullying incidents and the incidence of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). Bullying has also been connected to suicidal ideation (Klomek, 2007).

"The process of utilizing the Internet, cell phones, or other devices to communicate or upload text or photos designed to injure or shame another person" is how the National Crime Prevention Council (2012) describes cyberbullying. Youth who persistently use computers to threaten or harass their peers is said to be engaging in cyberbullying (Hinduja&Patchin, 2010). Cyberbullying is defined as the use of internet communication to threaten or intimidate a person, usually via sending messages of that type. On digital media in society, harassment and antagonism are still prevalent. Cyberbullying can cause considerable psychological, emotional, or social harm, therefore its negative impacts are not little or insignificant. Cyberbullying is described as "an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is repeatedly and over time carried out by a group or

an individual against a victim who is unable to readily defend himself or herself" (Smith & Slonje, 2007).

Price and Dalgleish (2010) state: "Cyberbullying is the term used to refer to any forms of bullying that use electronic tools like the internet and cell phones to damage someone forcefully and intentionally. Cyberbullying frequently involves recurrent behaviour and an imbalance of power between the attacker and victim, just like "conventional" bullying." In contrast, research on cyberbullying is still in its infancy. "Bullying through the use of electronic venues, such as instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms, websites, online games, social networking sites, and text messaging," is the definition given for cyber bullying" (Kowalski & Limber, 2013).

As stated in Nasrullah (2014), Willard, Director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use in America, defines cyberbullying as a conduct of defamation, humiliation, marginalization, disclosure of information or privacy content with the specific intent of embarrassing, or can also be construed with offensive disparaging vulgar comments.

Cyber bullying is a recent development. Its digital nature enables a permanent record of damaging material that may have an impact on pupils' present and future emotional and psychological states. This can have a substantial negative effect on pupils' academic performance, which may be shown in their lack of dedication to school, troublesome conduct, and substance misuse. Teachers, who are frequently at the forefront of dealing with student misbehavior in school settings, play a crucial role in combating bullying. This study focuses on how university students perceive bullying. Understanding their perceptions is a necessary first step to help teachers develop a good understand of and skills to manage bullying.

### **1.1 Research objectives:**

- To investigate university students' perception that what are the factors which instigate cyber bullying?
- To assess the distinction between the perception of male and female students about cyber bullying.
- To know about the existing pattern of cyber bullying among the university students.
- To find the victims of cyber bullying in the university.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

Cyberbullying is a form of aggression carried out through electronic devices, characterized by intentional and repeated harm (Smith, 2006; Krešić Ćorić & Kaštelan, 2020). It typically occurs around age 14 when youth spend more time on mobile phones and social media (Krešić Ćorić & Kaštelan, 2020). Prevalence estimates range from 15-55% of young people being victims (Krešić Ćorić & Kaštelan, 2020; Guan et al., 2016). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying allows for greater anonymity and potential for widespread exposure (Krešić Ćorić & Kaštelan, 2020). Both males and females can be perpetrators and victims, with older, more tech-savvy individuals at higher risk (Guan et al., 2016). Cyberbullying is associated with mental health issues, including depression and suicidal behaviors (Krešić Ćorić & Kaštelan, 2020). Research focuses on prevalence, age and gender differences, predictors, effects, and coping strategies (Smith, 2015). Future studies should examine the efficacy of interventional programs to address

this growing social issue (Guan et al., 2016).

In last few years cyber bullying widely been studied, the criteria used in various studies have commonly altered. Since it is challenging to get to a consensus, the "description" is still up for question among academics throughout the world. This occasionally had significant effects on the results. However, for the purposes of this study and in bright of the most recent research in the area, cyberbullying is defined a victim who is unable to easily protect themselves, as "violent, intentional act or conduct that is performed out by a group or a person repeatedly and over time." (Smith &Slonje, 2007). In Montenegro, high school students engage in and experience various forms of cyberbullying, with online ridicule and identity concealment being common (Draganić et al., 2024). Price and Dalglish (2010) elaborated on this jargon further "Cyber bullying is a term used to refer to any sorts of bullying that aggressively and purposely hurt a victim using electronic tools like the internet and cell phones. Studies have demonstrated about cyber bullying hurts the stranded victims physically and emotionally in addition to generating psychosocial concerns such behavior problems, drinking alcohol (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2007), smoking, melancholy, and a lack of devotion to academics (Selkie et al., 2015). Victims of cyber bullying go through a lot of emotional stress, which makes it hard for them to concentrate on their studies, which has a bad effect on their academic progress (Akci, 2018). Since the victims of cyber bullying commonly suffer psychological harm, the discouraging effect prevents adolescents from succeeding in their academics (Faryadi, 2011).

Anxiety, depression, substance misuse, low self-esteem, interpersonal problems, family strife, and academic underperformance were found to be significantly associated with the prevalence of cyberbullying victimization overall among undergraduate college students (Beebe, 2010). A physically, emotionally, or verbally weaker victim is frequently tormented by a comparatively powerful offender as part of bullying, which is a subtype of violent conduct (Olweus, 1994).

Much of what is observe as cyber bullying is actually cruel drama and disputes between teenagers (Johnson, 2013). Numerous academics have studied cyber bullying and have researched a wide range of character, behavioral, and population factors that are associated with either existence the victim or bullies (Staksrud, 2018).

Teachers have traditionally been required to confront bullying in the classroom as part of their responsibilities (Von Marées&Petermann 2012). The inconsistent definitions and assessment techniques used in the study (Espelage 2017), which has an impact on publicwith their opinion engagement in bullying, cause these reports on bullying's prevalence to fluctuate (Przybylski and Bowes 2017).

Cyber bullying differs from old-style bullying in that it can happen at any time, reach a far bigger audience and potentially be unrestrained increased visibility, and the bully can decide to stay anonymous (Ortega-Ruiz, 2013). Participation in cyber bullying has been associated with a number of unfavorable effects, such as lower self-esteem (Brewer and Kerlake 2015; Lohbeck and Petermann 2018; Patchin and Hinduja 2010), a decline in grades and academic performance (Kowalski and Limber 2013; Kowalski et al. 2014), suicidal thoughts or attempts (Hinduja and

Patchin 2010, 2019), and a negative impact on the climate and community of a school (Cohen and Freiberg 2013). According to longitudinal study, bullying engagement has negative effects on social and academic outcomes that last into young adulthood (Wolke et al., 2013). However, under the theoretical notion of self-efficacy, the goal and action might also diverge. For instance, studies have demonstrated that raising self-efficacy can help close the intention-behavior gap by encouraging both certain and, more crucially, act needed to prosper a condition (Isa et al., 2019).

However, given pressure educational institutions are under to achieve cyber bullying (Green et al., 2017), it is crucial to investigate viewpoints of persons in the schooling profession concerning the basics that might impact cyber bullying intervention. A new international survey of the literature on educators' perspectives of cyber bullying found contradictory findings on teachers' management of cyber bullying and a little body of research that addresses this developing problem (Macaulay et al., 2018). For instance, some educators trust that cyber bullying is not a problematic that they are in charge of (Li, 2009), while others feel unprepared (Brown & Jackson 2012) and need to take further steps to address the problem (Green et al. 2017).

### 3.0 Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature and focuses on the subjective reality of student's perception on Cyber bullying. The research design applied is phenomenology due to perception and experience of students on cyber bullying. The study's participants were the student of the University of Sargodha. The sample size was 20 students. Purposive sampling technique was applied by keeping in front of the purpose of research. In-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted to collect the information. Every interview guides the next interview and researcher will add or drop the themes according to the collected data. For the purpose of thematic analysis, all interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The coding procedure was followed into three phases as done in qualitative methodology. Firstly, the researcher examined the data by using an open coding technique to condense it into a preliminary analytic category or codes. Then the researcher implied axial coding to organize codes, link these codes together, and then identify crucial analytic categories. At the final stage, selective coding was done. At this stage, the researcher continuously examines previous codes and refined data that back up the conceptual coding categories that have been created. The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. Each of these themes is encapsulated in its category and concept, as demonstrated in the table below.

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Social media</b>	➤ Excess use of social apps, such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc.
	➤ Awareness of media
	➤ Modern technology
<b>Physical harassment</b>	➤ Staring
	➤ Stalking
	➤ Unintentional touch
	➤ Ragging
	➤ Trolling

<b>Modernism/ Liberalism</b>	➤ Bold dressing ➤ Girl's and boy's friendship ➤ Strong family background ➤ Liberty from the home ➤ Deterioration of religious values
<b>Co-education</b>	➤ Group studies ➤ Sharing numbers ➤ Making friends

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## 4.0 Findings and Results

### 4.1 Social Media:

This was the most common theme among every interview. Almost every participant responded that social media is the most common medium of cyber bullying. Everyone had their own opinion regarding social media and cyber bullying which is stated below.

“... The social media is now a day just use for show off and fun and more than that it is complete waste of time. Only google and WhatsApp is currently useful for studies. Other than this many social media apps are the source of cyber bullying...” (Participant 04)

Another participant said:

“... I face many problems due to social media and now I am totally away from social media kind of disease and so every girl should stay away from this...” (Participant 05)

Another participant said with aggression:

“... My friend has suffered a lot, girls should never trust a boy, a boy can never be a good friend of a girl...” (Participant 07)

Another participant stated about cyber bullying:

“... Cyber bullying remained a very interesting topic for me, because when i came into university life, I've seen many cases of cyber bullying and harassment. So it will be fun for me to talk about this issue...” (Participant 08)

She further stated with aggression:

“... It is a very common issue in universities. For me, I have seen such issues literally on daily basis. Not even students bully each other I have seen many teachers as well who bully students. If I talk about my department some of our teachers are literally molesters. They harass students and in return students cannot share this problem to anyone...” (Participant 08)

One of the participants responded:

“... The main cause of cyber bullying is unnecessary use of social media. The use of various social media apps is very common at universities in the name of studies and students have no difficulty in finding someone's personal data. They can easily contact whoever they want...” (Participant 02)

One participant said:

“... Today's boys have freedom and complete support from families. They learn

such behaviors from families. They are independent. The use of social media is increased. Everyone is trying to make their social media account impressive. The use of “Snapchat” is increased. And it is very common to make friends on snapchat. Students are in touch with each other 24/7...” (Participant 10)

Another participant said:

“... Social media is the cause of cyber bullying. Cyber harassment becomes so easy because of the excessive use of technology. Improved technology is also the reason of cyber harassment. Every single person is using mobile phone and somehow knows the technology...” (Participant 18)

Another respondent responded that:

“... Cyber bullying is a very common issue especially at universities. The access of contact number is very easy. People exchange their contact number and usually boys distribute girl’s number to one another. Secondly, the use of social media is very common at university. So, the main cause of cyber bullying is “social media...” (Participant 13)

#### **4.2 Physical harassment**

Harassment involves repeatedly sending offensive messages and cyber stalking moves harassment online, with the offender sending threatening messages to his or her victim. Denigration occurs when the cyber bully sends untrue or hurtful messages about a person to other. Physical harassment involves stalking, staring, unintentional touch, ragging and trolling.

#### **4.3 Stalking**

Following someone all the time is called stalking. In universities it is a very common activity. Boys usually stalk girls and then take their information. One respondent said:

“... A guy from any other department stalked me for few days, and then he followed me to the home. Then he used to follow me at university and tease me in front of my friends. It was really embarrassing...” (Participant)

#### **4.4 Staring**

Keeping an eye on someone for a long time is called staring. It is also a very common activity in university. Many respondents claimed this activity is very common. One of the participants responded:

“... Staring is the most favorite activity for the boys. They stare girls like they have the right to stare. It is very strange and embarrassing...” (Participant 10)

#### **4.5 Unintentional touch**

Many respondents responded that unintentional touch is common in university. Some culprits touch the girls passing by and harass them. One respondent was very upset while telling:

“... A boy from another department used to stalk me and one day he crossed his limit. He along with some of his friends passed by and he touched me, I got aggressive at that time. This was the most embarrassing moment for me from my

university life...” (Participant 13)

#### **4.6 Strong family background**

This sub-theme illustrates that students from strong family backgrounds have liberty to speech and they do whatever they want to at university.

One participant said:

“...it is useless to talk on these issues because no one is going to take it seriously. Boys’ going to do whatever they want to and no one would ever ask them for their wrong action...” (Participant 10)

#### **4.7 Liberty from the home**

This sub-theme shows that the student either boys or girls have liberty from home. They spend time with friends after classes. Relationships are becoming trend nowadays. Students have their own choices. Many respondents said that students have liberty from the home especially boys.

One participant said:

“... Due to the liberalism, culture and values changed, students have their own choices and they have the liberty from the homes. Boys and girl’s friendship and relationship are common as well, and they spend most of the times together. Definitely problems will take place due to the liberty...” (Participant 15)

#### **4.8 Co- education**

This theme illustrates that the co-education is the main reason of cyber bullying and harassment. Opposite genders always attract each other and in co-education students study combine and many problems takes place. Most of the participant reported that co-education is the reason of cyber bullying.

One participant said;

“... Increased in the problems like cyber bullying and harassment takes place when the co-education becomes common in universities...” (Participant 16)

#### **4.9 Groups study**

Group study is common in university. Boys and girls study together in groups and share their contacts. And hence make groups on WhatsApp. Some enjoy this positively and some use girl’s contacts in negative manner. Many participants reported that the group study is later on also becomes the cause of cyber bullying.

One participant said:



“...The use of various social media apps is very common at universities in the name of studies and students have no difficulty in finding someone’s personal data. They can easily contact whoever they want. There are a lot of cases in front of me but students could not report these cases to the university because they are equally involved and once trusted their group fellows...” (Participant 02)

#### **4.10 Sharing numbers**

Almost all of the participants responded that sharing contact number is very common in university. Some boys use the contact numbers for negative purpose and starts harassing women. Cyber bullying becomes very easy due to the easy access of mobile numbers.

One participant reported:

“...I have seen many girls who are not strong enough to face this issue, they remain silent and hence they are so depressive, and also these kinds of girls lose their confidence and live life full of misery...” (Participant 08)

#### **4.11 Making friends**

This sub-theme illustrates that the making friend and sharing personal life with them is also a cause of cyber bullying. At first girls make friends and later on due to some personal issues that friends start to blackmail girls. Many of the respondents reported that this is the reason of cyber bullying. It also includes liberalism and modernism.

One participant stated:

“...Cyber bullying is a criminal conduct. Cyber bullying is a crime that destroys people life...” (Participant 16)

Another respondent quoted with aggression that:

*“...a boy and a girl can never be friends...”* (Participant 11)

He continued and said:

“...Girls should be strong and never respond a boy. Girl should not make a boyfriend...” (Participant 14)

#### **5.0 Discussion and Conclusion**

This research has studied “the more social media it is, the more dangerous it will be; student’s perception on cyber bullying”. Excessive use of mobile phones, social media, awareness of many social apps, co-education, sharing contacts and modernism are the main reasons of cyber bullying. Students are addicted to social media and mobile phones. They have adopted the modern culture. They don’t follow the religious values anymore. On the other hand, relationship kind of things is very common at university. They eliminate their frustration by bullying others. This research shows that the girls are more harassed than boys. Due to the patriarchal system men have the power and they negatively use the power and harass women. It is concluded from the research that the

main reasons of the cyber bullying are excessive use of social media. And girls are comparatively more harassed than boys.

**Muhammad Mohsin Khan:** Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

**Nimra Safdar:** Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

**Kumail Raza:** Data Collection, Idea Refinement

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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