

International Journal of Psychology Research



ISSN Print: 2664-8903
ISSN Online: 2664-8911
Impact Factor: RJIF 5.24
IJPR 2024; 6(1): 25-29
www.psychologyjournal.in
Received: 05-01-2024
Accepted: 03-02-2024

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Effects of cyberbullying on women's mental health

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648903.2024.v6.i1a.47>

Abstract

Cyberbullying is a growing problem associated with act of giving ridicule comments, body shaming and harassment against someone through digital communication such as social media. Nowadays, young adults spend a great deal of time using and interacting through digital communication via electronic device. As a result, the effects of Cyberbullying spreads all over the world, from school to workplaces. Bullying and Cyberbullying might seem similar but it has stark differences. It has been noticed that in case of cyberbullying, the perpetrators do not have the fear of being caught and this makes the situation even worse for the victims, unlike in cases of traditional bullying. Cyberbullying also has significant negative impact on people's self-esteem. Hence, this study tries to determine the effects of cyberbullying on women's mental health and how it impacts the general wellbeing and self-esteem of a woman. Increased awareness and timely reporting of such incidents are likely to lessen the grim effects of this new-age digital bullying.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, self-esteem, mental health, young adults

Introduction

Bullying originally has been associated with early peer problems in school as it happens within the school premises and is witnessed by the peers (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Olweus, 1993) ^[10, 30]. It can occur in many contexts, in childhood and adult life (Monks *et al.*, 2009) ^[39]. As with traditional bullying, cyberbullying can take place in several forms- physical, social, relational, or psychological (Dooley *et al.*, 2009; Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 2013) ^[13, 40, 29]. The most commonly used methods, in national studies, have requested to talk online about sex or for sexual information and to do something sexual (Henry & Powell, 2018) ^[20]. Technology has provided the youth with more accesses to bully (Cook *et al.*, 2007) ^[9].

Cyberbullying perpetrators disturb their victims via email, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, or other social media (Dooley *et al.*, 2009) ^[13]. Cyberspace is providing a platform / space with the positive environment for cyber-behaviour to promote social responsibilities in young adults as well as adolescents. In many cases, young adults harassed online or by phone could easily block the harasser (Wolak *et al.*, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) ^[44, 45].

At the university level, two studies shown that, the prevalence of cyberbullying rate found in an adolescent meta-analysis with 19% (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014) ^[47] and 29% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010) ^[31] of the sample reporting experiences of cyberbullying. Additionally, Youths, who are cyberbullied show an increased susceptibility to suicidal thoughts and feelings of loneliness, both of which are often precursors of suicidal ideation and intention (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010) ^[22]. Cyberbullying on female victims is particularly important, as adolescent girls tend to use online networks more frequently than males (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Zazik & Park, 2010) ^[25, 34], and are, therefore, at greater risk of experiencing cybervictimization (Heiman & Shemesh, 2015) ^[18] as compared to male adolescents (Sourander *et al.*, 2010) ^[41].

Sexual Harassment most commonly occurs at school and in girls' neighbourhood (Reed *et al.*, 2019; Dalhqvist *et al.*, 2016; Chiodo *et al.*, 2009) ^[35, 11, 7]. Studies have shown that almost more than half (52%) of girls reported being sexually harassed (Hill & Kearl, 2011) ^[21]. Female victims of Cyberbullying experience higher rates of depression as compared to those who were not cyberbullied (Selkie *et al.*, 2015) ^[38].

The prevalence rates of cyber-bullying in teenagers and the identification of gender differences vary depending on empirical reports (Hébert *et al.*, 2017) ^[17]. Victimization was higher among non-heterosexually identified youths and they have depressive symptoms to suicidal attempts requiring medical treatment (Schneider *et al.*, 2012) ^[37]. Reduces of cyberbullying can cause the emotional regulation of students (Hemphill *et al.*, 2015) ^[19].

Victims are facing depression and various mental disorders; they becoming less active socially; suicidal attempts, insecurities and self-harm tendencies are increasing among them and their grade also affecting; they are lacking confidence etc. Cyberbullying has negative consequences for the psychological, social and physical health of both the bullies and victims involved (Baumen *et al.*, 2013 and Tokunga, 2010) ^[6, 42].

Self-esteem refers to the self-assessment of one's social role, and it has the potential to influence behavioural development (Rosenberg, 1965) ^[36]. Kowalski and Limber (2013) ^[26] also found a positive correlation ($r = .190$) between self-esteem and cyberbullying among university students in the U.S. People with low self-esteem are more likely to act and behave aggressive to gain power and achieve a higher level of self-esteem (Lei *et al.*, 2020) ^[27]. Low self-esteem due to cyberbullying can cause depression (Pradhan *et al.*, 2022) ^[32].

Cyberbullying has several negative consequences in children and adolescents: anxiety (Han *et al.*, 2018) ^[16], depression and substance abuse (Iranzo *et al.*, 2019) ^[5], risk behaviors (Gunther *et al.*, 2016) ^[12] and somatic problems. The victims of cyberbullying have a higher risk of depressive symptoms (Maurya *et al.*, 2022) ^[28]. Cyberbullying is also associated with increased risk of suicidal behaviors (Baiden & Tadeo, 2020; John *et al.*, 2018) ^[4, 22]. They refer to behaviors associated with the intention of ending one's own life (Mishara and Tousignant, 2004, p. 32) ^[14]. Cyberbullying also leads to an increased risk of self-harm behaviors, such as self-cutting or self-burning, in victims and perpetrators (John *et al.*, 2018; Jose and Fu, 2018; Peng *et al.*, 2019) ^[22, 24, 43]. Self-harm behaviors refer to behaviors leading to self-injury without suicidal intent (Mishara and Tousignant, 2004) ^[14]. When combined with traditional in-person bullying, cyberbullying can have an independent and cumulative effect on suicidal and self-harm behaviors (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018; John *et al.*, 2018; Zaborskis *et al.*, 2019) ^[22, 23, 46].

When children and adolescents are asked what they think they would do if cyberbullied, the most often suggested ways of coping has been through different ways of technically protecting oneself from harassment online (Aricak *et al.*, 2008, Smith *et al.*, 2008) ^[2, 40]. These technical solutions can consist of blocking certain people from contacting you online, changing passwords, user names or e-mail addresses and deleting anonymous text messages without reading them, (Smith *et al.*, 2008) ^[40]. Ang and Goh (2010) ^[1] proposed empathy training and education in cyberbullying intervention programs with emphasis on cognitive components of empathy for boys and affective components of empathy for girls.

Objective

This study is to find out the effect of cyberbullying in women's mental health, self-esteem, and depression.

Methodology

In study, a multistage procedure employed to understand the significant relationship between cyberbullying and women's mental health, self-esteem, and depression.

Site and Population

In this study, 120 female individuals aged between 18 to 28 years are used. There are some general inclusion criteria that is aged between 18 to 28, gender is female, and those who are use social media platform. Similarly, there are some general exclusion criteria like individual who are less than 18 and more than 28 are not used, male participants are not used.

Sampling Design

Purposive sampling technique has been used. The individuals who have fulfilled all the criteria for each of the group were included in the sample. The inclusion and exclusion criteria considered for selection of sample, as well as the inclusion of the participants, victim of cyberbullying, needed purposive sampling.

Tool and Scale

In this study, self-administered questionnaires are used. Those are- 1) Cyberbully / Victim Scale – Mehmet Bariş Horzum (2010) ^[3]: This is a 5point scale with 15 items for each dimension. There are 2 dimensions in this scale, a) Cyber Victim and b) Cyber Bully. 2) General Health Questionnaire – Goldberg and Miller (1979): General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) was designed by Goldberg and Miller (1979) ^[15] as a state measure. GHQ 28 containing 28 items, derived from factor analysis of GHQ 60. It consists of 4 Sub-scales for somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe Depression. 3) Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire- Rosenberg, M. (1965) ^[36]: A 10-item scale that Measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the Self. The scale is believed to be unidimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Ethical Issue

The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, further, informed consent from the respondents were taken before administration of the test.

Data collection and Analysis

The primary data was collected during July 10, 2023 to August 10, 2023. 120 female individuals aged between 18-28 years participated in this study. Purposive sampling technique was used here. The aim of this study was to determine the effects of cyberbullying on women's mental health and how it impacts the general wellbeing and self-esteem of a woman.

Depression & Self-esteem

Depression had been calculated using the General Health Questionnaire and Self-esteem has been calculated by using Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire.

Results

There is no significant difference between Cyberbullying and Self-Esteem and also there is no significant difference between Cyberbullying and Mental Health (Depression).

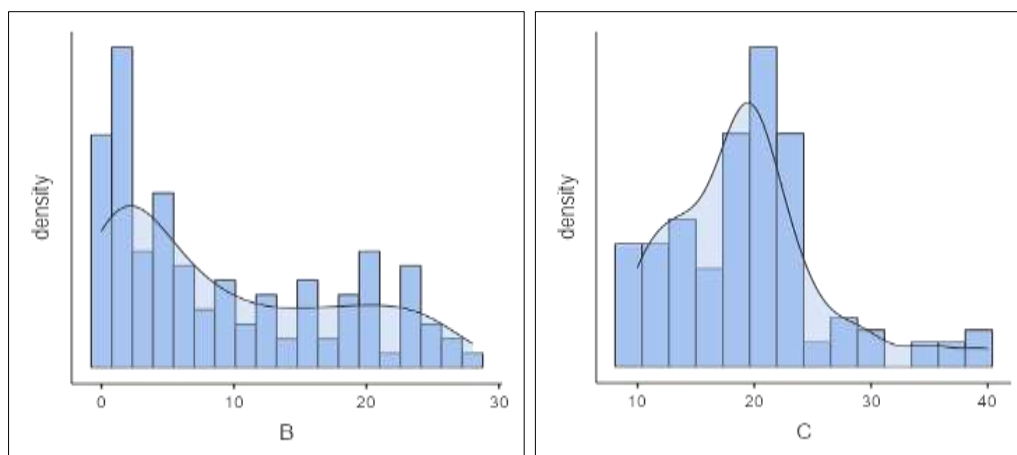


Fig 1: Skewness of the Distribution

Discussion and Conclusion

From this research, we have found that, some people have certain knowledge and awareness about cyberbullying. So, whenever they face any kind of cyberbullying, they block the perpetrators immediately from the social media sites and the call-lists. For this reason, the cyberbullying can't affect their self-esteem and mental health. Previously, a lot of research has been done on cyberbullying. There after many prevention and intervention techniques like blocking, reporting on social media, calling and in cyberbullying cells are developed. So, nowadays people are more aware about cyberbullying. Similarly, there are several laws in India that provide protection against Cyber Sexual Harassment, including sections 66A, 66C, 66D, 66E, 67, 67A, and 72 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, as well as sections 354C, 354D, and 509 of the Indian Penal Code, section 507 of the Indian Penal Code for Cyberbullying. The variables we have used in this research like cyber-bullying, mental health, self-esteem will be helpful for further research study. This study may help the counselors and psychologists to help the victim cope with the trauma of cyberbullying and to rehabilitate the cyberbully.

Contributors

AG and NM have conceptualized the paper. AG, DR, MB did the initial literature search, collected data, analyzed it and framed the manuscript. All the authors have read and approved the final version of the report.

Conflicts of interest

No conflict of interest.

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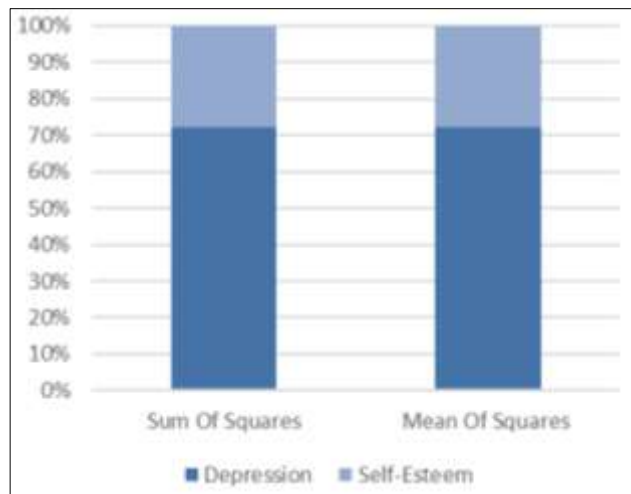
Appendixes

Table 1: Represents, the mean of Depression & Self-esteem which is 9.18 and 19.4 with the Standard Deviation 8.56 and 6.57 respectively.

	Depression	Self-esteem
N	120	120
Mean	9.18	19.4
Median	6.00	20.0
Standard Deviation	8.56	6.57

Table 2: Presents the Mean Squares of depression and self-esteem which are 93 and 36 with F Ratio 1.385 and 0.793 respectively.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Cyber-bullying	Depression	2605	28	93.0	1.385	0.126
	Self-esteem	1008	28	36.0	0.793	0.753



Graph 1: Graphical Representation of Table 2