

*The Effect of
Cyberbullying:
An Everlasting
Torture*

Executive summary

The purpose of this paper is to examine cyberbullying, provide an overview of the negative effects of cyberbullying, and include prevention strategies to minimize cyberbullying moving forward.

Introduction:

- A description of what cyberbullying is and how it has impacted society.
- A concise discussion on how cybercrime is committed.
- An understanding of the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying.
- Myths of cyberbullying.

Facts and Figures:

- Offenders of cyberbullying show early signs of violence, aggression, and criminal behavior.
- There's a negative influence of technology in adolescents that choose to abuse platforms and applications to harm or harass an individual.
- Since cyberbullying is prevalent within adolescents, it shows an increase of students who experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Moving Forward:

- Helpful practices to address cyberbullying.
- Intervention, prevention and educational strategies to lessen cyberbullying.
- A call to action directed at schools, victims, policy makers and state officials.

Introduction

Cyberbullying is an imperative issue that has affected individuals in society psychologically, mentally, and emotionally since the 1990s. According to Tokunaga (2010), cyberbullying can be defined as “any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (p. 278). However, there tends to be many definitions of cyberbullying. It also can be explained as a person or group having power over another individual (Graham, 2018). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (2013) Youth Risk Behavior Survey there are “at least 21 percent of girls and eight percent of boys admitted to being bullied through electronic means, such as texting, email, instant messaging, and websites (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009 as cited in Graham, 2018). According to Graham (2018) cyberbullying includes four components: (1) a repeated behavior, (2) the behavior is in the digital environment, (3) a power differential between offender and victim, and (4) the behavior is meant to harm.

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying may seem equal but the two have differences. The main difference is in the means of producing harm – physical versus symbolic (Graham, 2018). Additionally, cyberbullying can be seen as less widespread than traditional, physical bullying (Graham, 2018). According to Olweus (2012) the interest in cyberbullying is largely media driven, and that parents and practitioners need to be more observant and focused on traditional bullying. However, just because traditional bullying is more prevalent does not mean that cyberbullying is not an important issue (Graham, 2018). “Indeed, because cyberbullying effects young people disproportionately, and because the victims of cyberbullying have often been

pushed to high profile suicides, cyberbullying has garnered a large amount of media attention” (Graham, 2018).

As with all other topics, there comes myths with cyberbullying. As we see on television, cyberbullying usually results in suicide (Graham, 2018). However, this can be deceptive to the public and is not substantiated in the reality of cyberbullying (Graham, 2018). An example of a cyberbullying myth is “cyberbullying causes suicide”. This can be seen as media driven.

According to Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja (2013)

The vast majority of cyberbullying victims do not kill themselves, and those who do typically have experienced a constellation of stressors and other issues operating in their lives, making it difficult to isolate the influence of one specific personal or social problem as compared to others (p. 2705).

Although this issue needs to be addressed, those individuals who have committed suicide usually do it because they have experienced other destructive experiences or social dysfunctions (Graham, 2018). Another myth is “to stop cyberbullying, just turn off your computer or cell phone”. Although parents and others may believe that taking their child out of the digital environment is effective, it can be proven as non-realistic (Graham, 2018). Turning off an electronic device is temporality and will not stop someone from having to use their phone eventually. They will ultimately find their self-checking their emails, messages, social media, etc. and be reminded of their experience with cyberbullying. It is essential for young people to learn how to seek, interpret, and produce symbolic communication on the internet. This will make them more aware of how to anticipate and defend against cyberbullying in the future (Graham, 2018).

There are a variety of ways to commit cybercrime. Whether you use your cellular device to create a message of hate or dislike for a person and sharing it with others or posting an embarrassing picture of someone online, this can be defined as cybercrime. With traditional bullying, it can be seen as temporality. On the other hand, with cyberbullying, it can be seen as everlasting and traumatizing. Cyberbullying comes with a broader audience than traditional bullying (Holladay, 2011). For an example, two individuals can get into a physical fight and it can be over but if a classmate sends a humiliating video around of another student it brings the situation to another level, causing loads of people to see it. Victims who experience being exposed to the internet with no consent from their offender oftentimes feel powerless or helpless to know that there is nothing they can do to erase this memory from the viewers.

“Anywhere from one-third to one-half of youths have been targeted by cyberbullies” (Holladay, 2011). There has been a decline in academic performance to suicide in those experiences (Holladay, 2011). Unfortunately, there has been given little attention to this worldwide issue and how cyberbullying can hinder students from excelling in their studies (Lauren, 2011 as cited in Faryadi, 2011). Not only does cyberbullying affect students, it affects parents, schools, and communities. The sad part about it is that the victims who experience cyberbullying suffer silently because the issue is not taken as seriously as it should. It can be understood that technology can be seen as creating more stress in the form of cyberbullying than helping students excel in their studies (Faryadi, 2011). “Research findings have shown that young students who become victims of cyberbullies suffer great stress” (Elizabeth, 2010 as cited in Faryadi, 2011). The results of a recent study have signified that cyberbullying indeed affects students emotionally as well as academically (Faryadi, 2011). Schools should be more aware of how cyberbullying takes a toll on students emotionally and psychologically, which can

contribute to their grades deteriorating (Faryadi, 2011). They should also learn how to effectively protect students who have experienced cyberbullying as well as traditional bullying.

Facts and Figures

Cyberbullying is the use of electronic technology to purposely harass and threaten another person or multiple people. People use technology to their advantage and abuse the device by using it to harm another individual. Typically, cyberbullying is predominant in adolescents and also in schools, these engagements occur on social media, texts, e-mail, and so on. The Pew Research Center reports that 59% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Popular forms of cyberbullying include, name calling, spreading rumors, physical threats and the sharing of explicit photos without consent (See Figure 4). This behavior can share either personal or harmful information about a person, and at times go as far as committing criminal activity (“Facts About Bullying,” n.d.). There are many tactics that fall in the realm of cyberbullying. Stereotypical beliefs that perpetrators use to their advantage include race, gender & sex preference, appearance, disabilities, etc. Since technology has grown immensely throughout the years, the numbers of victims of cyberbullying have skyrocketed. According to Pew Research Center, 95% of teenagers from ages 13-17 have a smartphone or have access to a smartphone. There is a shocking number of cyberbullying through mobile phones amongst girls and boys ages 8-15 (See Figure 2). These teenagers also have access to online applications and social media where cyberbullying is most prevalent (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr are some examples of applications and platforms where cyberbullying usually occurs (See Figure 1). Cyberbullying is concerning because of the amounts of people that can access that information on the internet. One of the many reasons why cyberbullying is harmful is because the internet can connect and expose people’s information

just by simply posting the object, which can be viewed by a vast majority of people. Adolescents may be afraid to report cybercrime therefore; their parents take the responsibility. Typically, there are parents worldwide who report their child's experience with cybercrime. (See Figure 3).

“Adolescents who are targeted via cyberbullying report increased depressive affect, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal behavior, and somatic symptoms. Perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to report increased substance use, aggression, and delinquent behaviors” (Nixon, 2014). Unfortunately, the person committing the harassment against an individual cannot fully understand the significance it has on the person being targeted. There are real stories that the press or news have covered about adolescents that have committed suicide or have attempted suicide because they were victims of cyberbullying. There are also many teenagers that choose to hide that they are targets of cyberbully because of fear and other implications that force them to conceal it from their families and their teachers. Since technology has evolved drastically in the last decade, more suicides and depression have occurred in teens, which studies have traced back to the cyberbullying amongst the adolescents (Nixon, 2014). Schools have rules and regulations regarding cyberbullying and having no forms of bullying in schools; however, that doesn't stop students from continuing what they do outside of school hours or school authority. There isn't much supervision on adolescence cell phones or other electronics as there should be nowadays and because of that they are able to upload negative content on the web freely (What Is Cyberbullying, n.d.). In many ways, victims feel isolated and are unable to talk about the situation, so the anxiety and depression increases immensely for them and sometimes leads to suicide. “Notably, 93% of cyber victims reported negative effects, with the majority of victims reporting feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and powerlessness” (Nixon, 2014). Although, most

cases or instances of cyberbullying isn't essentially meant for an individual to commit suicide or have depression, the fact of the matter is that it happens and continues to happen in adolescents.

A high school senior, Brandy Vela, was a victim of cyberbullying when she started getting cruel, mean messages on her phone from an unknown user from her school. There was also a fake Facebook page and dating profiles made in her name to make fun of her and to bully her about her weight. Brandy told her family that she was going to commit suicide and that she couldn't take any more of the bullying. Her family tried to convince her to put the gun down, however moments later, she shot herself in the chest. The school said that she had complained weeks prior about her getting threatening messages from an unknown individual from school and they weren't able to track who the person was (Cbs/ap, 2017). This example is an illicit attack on an individual that did nothing to deserve the cyberbullying, however, the bullying continued to occur which led Brandy Vela to pull the trigger. Studies have shown that young women are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying; further, women are also more likely to commit suicide, in relation to cyberbullying, in middle school and high school. That doesn't eliminate the young men who are also victims of cyberbullying, which have shown an increase in the past years (Nixon, 2014).

Studies have also shown that people perpetrating the cyberbullying show an early sign of deviance within the individual. If the individual is able to bully someone online than most likely those actions will reflect on how the person will treat people offline or in real life; this includes them showing aggression and violence towards their victims. Also, it shows the people that are committing the cyberbullying may show an early sign of alcohol and drug use at the time of the cyberbullying or in the future. This behavior, whether the perpetrator or the victim, illustrates the

dangers on both sides of the spectrum in relation to cyberbullying and what it can do in the present and the future (Nixon, 2014).

Infographics/Tables

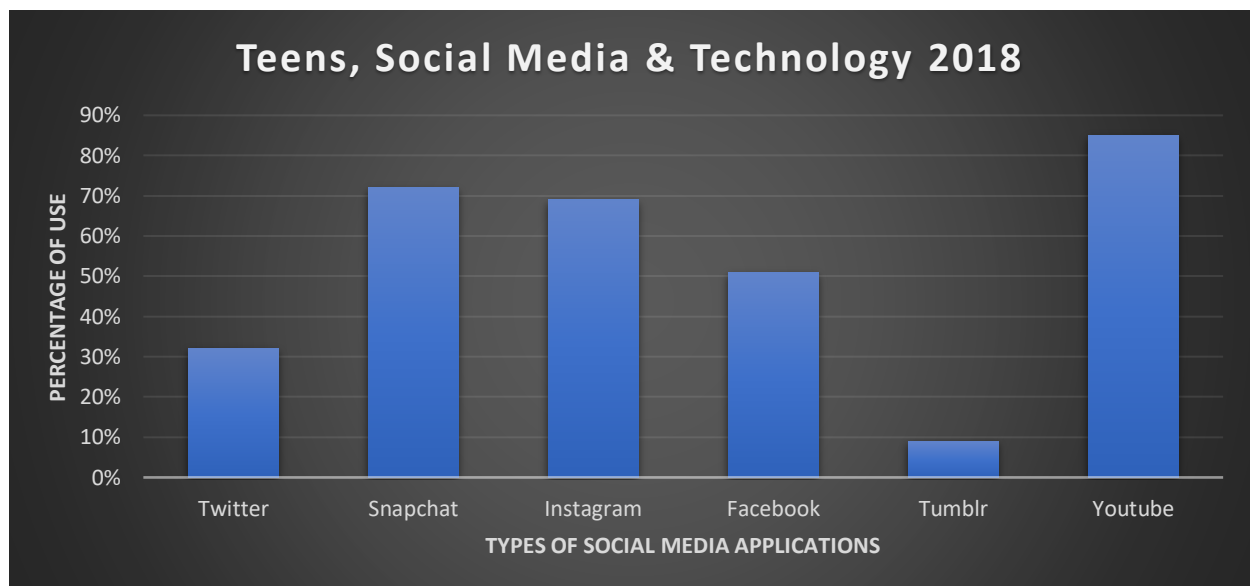


Figure 1. Percentage of different types of social media applications teens used in 2018.
Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

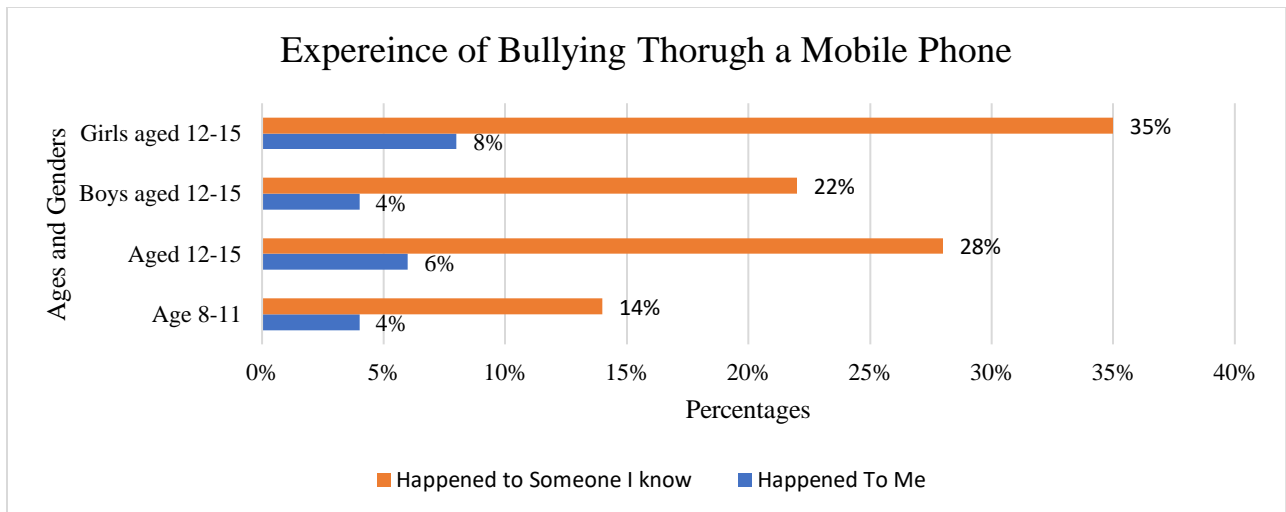


Figure 2. Reported cyberbullying through mobile phones in 2014. Source: [Business Insider](#)

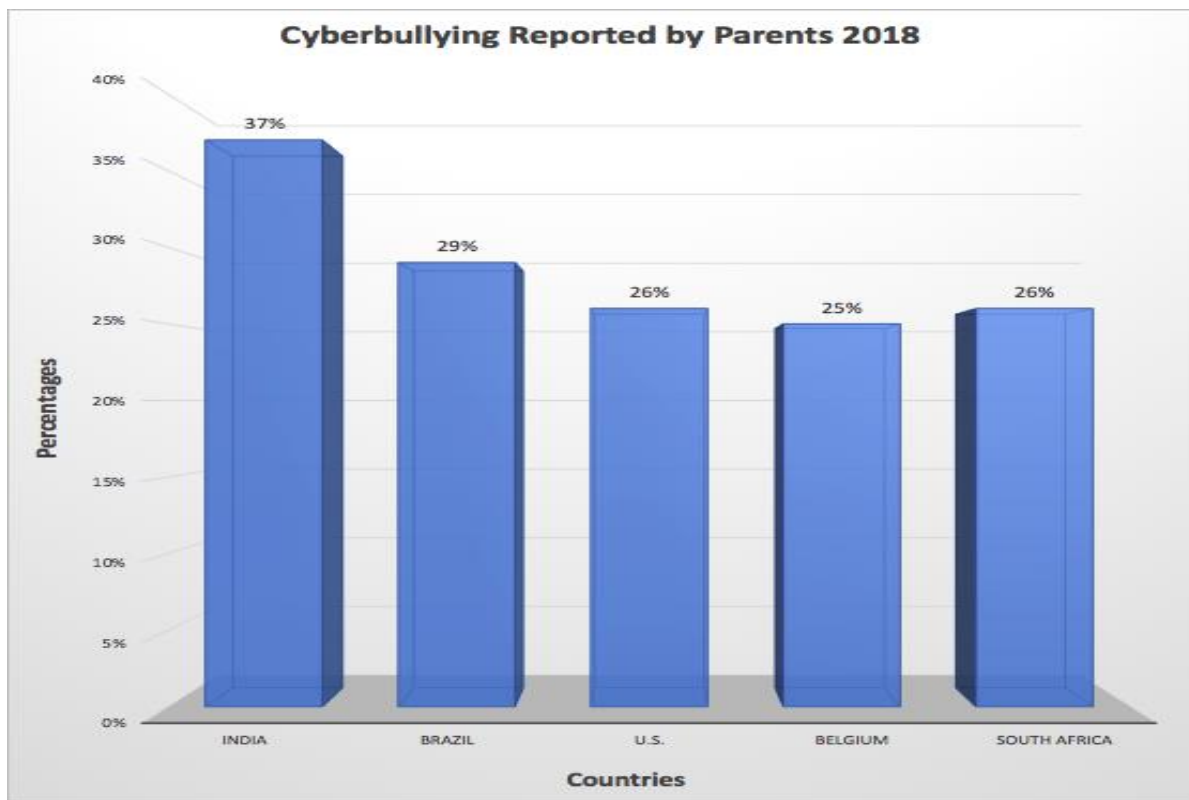


Figure 3. Highest ranked countries where cyberbullying was reported by parents the most in 2018. Source: [CEO world Magazine](#)

Popular Forms of Cyberbullying Amongst Teens
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/09/27/a-majority-of-teens-have-experienced-some-form-of-cyberbullying/>

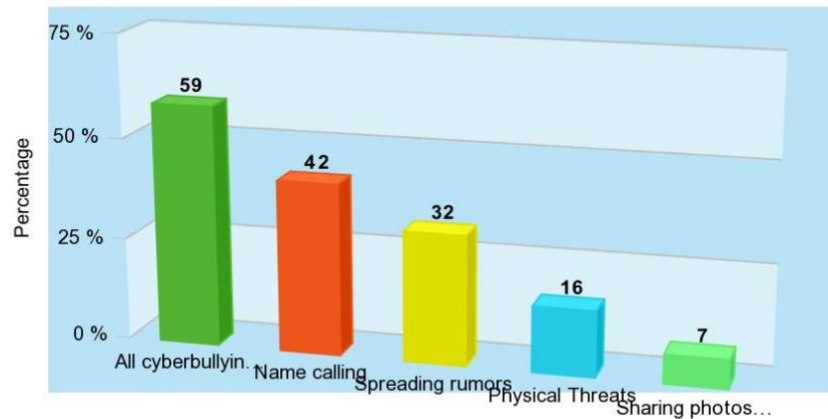


Figure 4: Popular forms of cyberbullying amongst teens. Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

Moving Forward

The future of cyberbullying is education, prevention, and intervention. Cyberbullying has become a more prevalent issue in our society because of technological advances. Cyberbullying has made our digital environment unsafe for children and young adults. Moving forward professionals believe education, prevention and, intervention are the best ways to curve cyberbullying. These methods are geared towards educators, parents, youth, and professionals in related fields and legislation makers (Vandebosch, 2014). Everyone should be involved in the fight to end cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a big problem among children and young adults (Vandebosch, 2014). Moving forward, educational practices should be geared toward children and young adults, not just parents and educators (Hong & Espelage, 2016). There should be more online resources that provide information to youth on the dangers, avoidance, and identifications of cyberbullying

(Hong & Espelage, 2016). Online resources need to address youth who want to control their online experiences without their parents being involved (Hong & Espelage 2016). Educational practices like experiential learning are recommended for educating youth on cyberbullying. These experiential learning services “focus on students’ knowledge and attitudes toward cyberbullying and involves completing 4 tasks in collaborative student groups” (Hong & Espelage 2016). There should still be a focus on educating educators. There should be more professional guidance, training, and manuals to help teaching professionals deal with cyberbullying (Vandebosch, 2014). Educators can make a difference and help students dealing with cyberbullying, but they must be educated on the subject to make a difference.

Education and prevention go hand in hand. Education is the best tool for prevention. Being educated on a subject like cyberbullying can help youth make the right choices. They can use the knowledge learned to make educated choices pertaining to cyberbullying. Youth should be educated on internet policies. Cyberbullying has been linked to e-safety, educating youth on internet policies can prevent cyberbullying (Vandebosch, 2014). Creating programs that address cyberbullying and internet safety are prevention measures against cyberbullying (Vandebosch 2014). Schools can utilize peer mentoring as a cyberbullying prevention tool. Peer mentoring involves older students communicating their experience and lessons with younger students. Peer mentoring involved with cyberbullying can promote positive online interactions (Patchin & Hinduja 2018). Other measures of prevention include teaching youth about privacy online (Cyberbullying Definitions). Implementing the right privacy settings on social media can help youth deal with cyberbullying. The more education the better prevention there will be against cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is an issue that we must tackle as a society. Cyberbullying affects us all one way or another. Intervention practices are necessary to combat cyberbullying. Schools focal point for combating cyberbullying should be implementing anti-cyberbullying policies (Vandebosch, 2014). These policies should be formalized and documented. There should be open discussions about cyberbullying in classes (Vandebosch, 2014). Schools should have awareness raising campaigns and implement school cyberbullying rules. Schools Intervention programs should “promote positive online interaction” while also appealing to the students. Intervention programs should appeal to students while staying true to its origins. Schools cyberbullying intervention programs should involve lesson plans administered by teachers and activities to engage students (Hong & Espelage, 2016). Programs already implemented in school to address bullying should include cyberbullying. Schools can utilize programs like these to address multiple forms of bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2016). Intervention programs should focus on “promoting empathy, perspective taking, communication skills, problem-solving, friendship skills, and so forth” (Hong & Espelage, 2016). Emotions and poor communication are usual causes of cyberbullying, addressing and providing solutions to these issues in intervention programs may prevent cyberbullying from occurring.

Policymakers in fields related to education, children, criminal justice and information technology should get involved (Vandebosch, 2014). Policymakers should organize initiatives that address cyberbullying in schools and create legislative initiatives like the Education 43 anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying policies (Vandebosch, 2014). Policymakers should provide facilities like support systems to schools to further promote awareness to cyberbullying (Vandebosch, 2014). All states have adopted laws or policies to prevent bullying. Bullying prevention laws and policies vary by state, yet they all have one purpose. The purpose of these

laws and policies is to protect the youth. States should revise or adopt new laws that prevent cyberbullying (Laws, policies & regulations). Cyberbullying can happen to anyone at any time. Adopting new policies and laws to address cyberbully is only a matter of time.

Moving forward, there should be an open dialogue about cyberbullying in schools, at home, and in government. Cyberbullying has become a huge issue because of our society technological advancements. Technology will continue to grow, and cyberbullying will follow. Methods for reducing cyberbullying are education, prevention, and intervention. Each serves an important role in the fight against cyberbullying. Everyone should be educated on this matter. Youth, educators, and parents should have educational services and programs about cyberbullying made available to them. Being educated on cyberbullying will increase preventing cyberbullying. Youth must be taught rules of the internet and prevention tools to combat cyberbullying. Everyone must intervene to see this problem go away. It takes a village to raise a child, and it will take a village to put an end to cyberbullying.

Glossary

Adolescent: youth, someone who isn't considered an adult

Cyberbullying: any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. (Graham, 2019).

Experiential learning: “is a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting” (“University of Colorado Denver”).

Legislative initiatives: “The right of competent persons and institutions to introduce for the consideration of a legislative body a bill or proposal to enact a new law or an amendment to or a repeal of existing legislation; legislative initiative entails the obligation to discuss the inclusion of the bill on the agenda of the legislative body” (“Encyclopedia”).

Perpetrator: a person who has committed a wrongdoing which causes harm or an offense to an individual.

Traditional bullying: Bullying that occurs by physical proximity.

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