



Digital Distress: Exploring the Link Between Cyberbullying and Mental Health

Akshat Tongya

CSIT dept.

*Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research
Indore, India*

Aditya Kumar Singh

CSIT dept.

*Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research
Indore, India*

Akshat Tiwari

CSIT dept.

*Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research
Indore, India*

Praveen Gupta

CSIT dept.

*Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research
Indore, India*

Abstract—This document serves as a model and guide for understanding the connection between cyberbullying and mental health. With the rise of the digital age, our communication methods have transformed dramatically, but this shift has also brought about a troubling side: cyberbullying. This abstract aims to give a thorough overview of the complex relationship between cyberbullying and mental health, highlighting the serious implications for individuals in today's world. Cyberbullying, which involves aggressive behavior carried out through electronic devices and online platforms, has gained significant attention due to its alarming frequency and devastating effects. It includes various harmful actions, such as harassment, threats, humiliation, and the sharing of damaging content, all taking place in a virtual environment. As digital technologies and social media have become more widespread, this issue has become increasingly common, especially among teenagers and young adults. Research indicates that the effects of cyberbullying on mental health are considerable. Victims often face a range of psychological and emotional challenges, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. The relentless and intrusive nature of cyberbullying can undermine a person's sense of safety and well-being, leading to lasting psychological damage.

Index Terms—Internet bullying, victimization, harassment, emotional health, counseling services, trolling

I. INTRODUCTION

Life can be tough, and now with the internet spreading like a wildfire, kids and teens are facing new threats in the form of cyberbullying. Bullying is done face-to-face, but cyberbullying is done on the internet and can locate its victims anywhere and anytime, making it even more harmful to their psychological health [1]. Cyberbullying is an expansion of bullying through electronic channels, traditionally linked with physical bullying but with significant differences. Cyberbullying offers anonymity, greater range, longer longevity, and easier evasion. Such features make it more hazardous and harder to describe specifically [2]. Both cyberbullying and conventional bullying have adverse effects on the mental health of adolescents, especially when they co-occur. A review of these papers found victims of both types are at higher risk for depression, self-harm, and suicide. This means the need for effective bullying prevention is more urgent than ever [3]. Cyberbullying affects 38.3 percent of Zagazig high school students in Egypt and at higher levels among girls, younger students, and overuse of the internet. Victims reported increased stress and worse mental health. Stress also mediated the cyberbullying-psychological well-being relationship. Intensive intervention is crucial to treat the students and prevent cyberbullying [4]. This



study investigated the relationship between school peer aggression rumination and social media rumination and distress among students. Social media overuse can worsen peer victimization and mental health. Students who, when distressed, ruminate on social media had higher scores on distress. These findings indicate the mental health risks of online behavior and school aggression [5]. Cyberbullying negatively affects the mental health and concentration of university students. Differences were recognized by sex, field of study, and economic status in the household. Cyberbullying was shown to have a high negative correlation with mental health. The research suggests creating awareness through precise programs to prevent cyberbullying [6]. This research links cyberbullying to high levels of depression and self-injury among youth. This highlights the roles of social media, coping strategies, and social support. Prevention programs and intervention projects should be designed to address the problems, as per the research [7]. Cyberbullying is the application of technology to threaten, harass, or harm others, through channels like offensive words or fake profiles. As technology advances, cyberbullying is now a social issue. Strategies to combat it should focus on controlling violent online behavior and curing social anxiety in victims. Raising awareness and creating supportive communities are crucial in addressing the situation [8]. This study examined the impact of online social capital and Internet self-efficacy on Chinese cyberbullying victims' mental health. It found that Internet self-efficacy exerted a buffering effect on cyberbullying, but online social capital had no effect in vocational schools. Prevention interventions for building these variables are suggested to enhance prevention [9]. Adolescents today use the internet to get through identity and affective crises, which is also known as "virtualescence." This online communication also subjects one to more cyberbullying—more than one online harassment by message, post, or email. Cyberbullying is a universal issue all around the world that touches every single country on this planet. It varies in its prevalence differently depending on various definitions, types, and methods used [10].



Fig. 1: Illustration of Cyberbullying Impact

II. TYPES AND FORMS OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying can present itself in various forms, each carrying its own set of characteristics and consequences. Recognizing these forms is essential for early identification, prevention, and effective response—particularly to protect victims' mental well-being.

• Harassment and Cyberstalking

Harassment typically involves the persistent delivery of offensive, abusive, or threatening messages through digital channels such as social media, email, or messaging platforms. It can appear in different ways: Direct harassment: Hurtful or threatening messages sent straight to the victim. Indirect harassment: Negative comments or rumors posted about the victim in public spaces online. Group harassment (cyber mobbing): When multiple individuals target a person simultaneously with sustained online abuse. At the more extreme end of the spectrum is cyberstalking, which includes obsessive monitoring, tracking, or threatening someone online. Common behaviors include: Repeated, unwanted contact. Hacking attempts or monitoring digital activity. False accusations aimed at damag-



ing someone's reputation. Victims of cyberstalking often experience heightened anxiety, fear, and emotional exhaustion, sometimes feeling unsafe even offline.

- **Doxxing (Exposing Private Information)**

Doxxing is the act of publishing someone's personal or sensitive information—like addresses, phone numbers, or workplace details—on the internet without their consent. This tactic is often used to intimidate or shame the individual publicly. The impacts can be intense and far-reaching: Loss of privacy: Victims may feel violated knowing their personal details are exposed. Increased vulnerability: Public information can lead to threats or harassment in both online and offline spaces. Reputational and professional damage: Victims may suffer social stigma or even job loss if the information affects their public image. Doxxing is particularly common in online conflicts, where it's often used as a retaliatory tool.

- **Impersonation and Identity Misuse**

In this form of cyberbullying, someone creates fake accounts pretending to be the victim, often to cause reputational harm or deceive others. This could involve: Posting inappropriate or offensive content under the victim's name. Sending malicious messages to the victim's contacts. Editing or misusing personal media to spread false narratives. A more serious version of this is identity theft, where the bully uses private data for fraudulent purposes—such as financial scams or phishing attempts. Victims often experience stress, confusion, and paranoia, as well as strained personal and professional relationships due to the misleading digital footprint created in their name.

- **Trolling and Hate Speech**

Trolling is the intentional posting of provocative or offensive content to elicit emotional reactions or spark arguments. While some forms may appear as teasing or sarcasm, more severe trolling can spread rumors or encourage hostility. Hate speech, on the other hand, directly targets individuals or communities based on aspects such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. This often involves: Discriminatory or degrading language. Calls for

violence or harm. Promotion of extremist or hateful ideologies. Both trolling and hate speech contribute to toxic online spaces and can have serious mental health effects, including depression, anxiety, and a sense of alienation.

- **Catfishing and Online Deception**

Catfishing involves creating a fake online persona to deceive others, often with the goal of emotional manipulation, financial exploitation, or blackmail. While it originally referred to romantic scams, it now spans various types of online interactions. Common tactics include: Building false emotional connections to manipulate the victim. Using trust to solicit money or personal content. Later exploiting that trust for coercion or blackmail.

The psychological impact of catfishing can be profound—victims may suffer from emotional trauma, financial loss, and long-term trust issues after realizing they were deceived.

III. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Cyberbullying has emerged as a major concern in our digital world, significantly impacting mental health. This study sets out to delve into various facets of cyberbullying, such as its prevalence, effects, and possible solutions. The aim is to provide a thorough understanding of the issue through focused objectives.

One of the key objectives of this research is to analyze the psychological and emotional toll cyberbullying takes on its victims. The consequences can be severe, including heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, often stemming from relentless online harassment [1]. Victims frequently experience a sense of isolation and helplessness, particularly when they feel unsupported or trapped in a cycle of digital attacks. Additionally, cyberbullying can lead to a significant drop in self-esteem due to public humiliation, and in extreme cases, prolonged harassment can result in suicidal thoughts and self-harm [3]. By highlighting these outcomes, the study emphasizes the urgent need for effective intervention strategies to protect vulnerable individuals [6].

Another objective is to identify the prevalence and patterns of cyberbullying. This includes an-



analyzing statistical trends in incidents over recent years and identifying the most affected age groups—especially adolescents and young adults [4]. The study also evaluates different cyberbullying behaviors such as harassment, defamation, and social exclusion. Furthermore, it explores gender-based differences to determine if males or females are more likely to be victims or perpetrators [6].

Lastly, the research examines the role of social media and digital platforms in the spread of cyberbullying. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp are commonly used for such activities [8]. This section investigates how content moderation policies, online trends, and user reporting systems influence the prevalence of cyberbullying. The goal is to identify where cyberbullying is most prevalent online and encourage tech companies to improve digital safety measures [10].

IV. CYBERBULLYING AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Cyberbullying, characterized by online harassment, threats, or abuse through digital platforms, has become a serious issue in the age of social media and smartphones—especially among adolescents. The anonymity and wide reach of the internet often embolden perpetrators, leading to significant psychological harm for victims, including anxiety, depression, and in extreme cases, suicidal tendencies. Despite the growing nature of the problem, there is no specific standalone law for cyberbullying in India. However, several existing legal provisions help address these offenses.

Although these laws provide a legal remedy, there is a need for a more targeted and comprehensive framework that specifically addresses the unique nature of cyberbullying in the digital age. Moreover, legal measures must be supported by awareness campaigns, educational programs in schools, and accessible reporting mechanisms to effectively combat cyberbullying. Encouraging responsible digital behavior and timely intervention can go a long way in protecting vulnerable groups and ensuring a safer online environment.

- **Criminal Intimidation (BNS Section 351):** This section deals with actions aimed at caus-

ing fear or harm to someone, whether through threats or intimidation. It includes both direct and indirect threats that cause distress or fear in the victim.

- **Punishment for Criminal Intimidation (BNS Section 351(2)):** This section outlines the legal consequences for those found guilty of criminal intimidation, including imprisonment or fines based on the severity of the offense.
- **Intimidation Through Anonymous Communication (BNS Section 351(3)):** This section addresses intimidation carried out through anonymous channels, such as online harassment or threats made without revealing the perpetrator's identity.
- **Cyberstalking (BNS Section 73):** Cyberstalking involves using digital or electronic means to repeatedly harass or monitor someone, causing distress or fear.
- **Invasion of Privacy (BNS Section 72):** This section covers the unauthorized capture, publication, or transmission of private content, violating an individual's right to privacy.
- **Posting Private or Morphed Images Without Consent (BNS Section 74):** This law criminalizes voyeurism and the sharing of private or altered images without the individual's consent, which can lead to serious harm and humiliation.
- **Defamation on Social Media (BNS Section 356):** Defamation through social media or other mediums involves spreading false statements or harmful content that damages someone's reputation.
- **Creating Fake Profiles or Impersonation (BNS Section 340):** This section focuses on identity theft and the illegal act of creating fake online profiles or impersonating someone for fraudulent or malicious purposes.

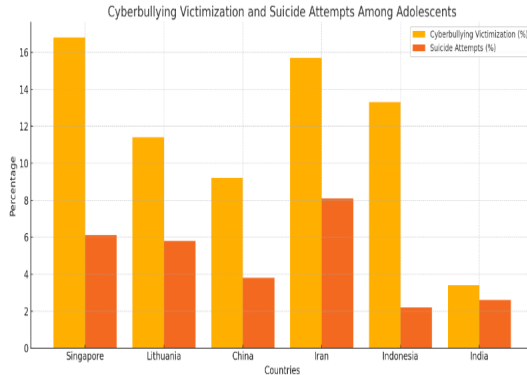


Fig. 2: Bar Chart representing death ratio from cyberbullying over the years

V. LITERATURE SURVEY

- 1) Smith, J. A. et al. in his work tracks the mental health of teens over time to understand the lasting effects of cyberbullying. The researchers found a strong link between long-term exposure to online harassment and higher levels of anxiety and depression, emphasizing how deeply cyberbullying can affect young people's emotional well-being.
- 2) Brown, L. et al. in their study analyzed a wide range of school-based intervention programs. This research identifies what makes anti-cyberbullying efforts in schools successful. It highlights best practices and effective strategies that schools can adopt to foster a safer and more supportive environment for students.
- 3) Garcia, M. D. et al. in their study of *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2019. Using interviews, this study explores how victims of cyberbullying manage their experiences. It reveals the critical role that friends, family, and support systems play in helping individuals cope and showcases a variety of strategies people use to navigate online harassment.
- 4) Lee, H. et al. in their study of *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 2016. This paper compares how different countries address cyberbullying from a legal standpoint. It evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of existing laws and suggests ways that legal systems can be improved to better combat online harassment.
- 5) Johnson, M. A. et al. in their study of *Journal of Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2019. Combining results from numerous studies, this analysis provides a broad overview of how cyberbullying affects mental health. The research consistently shows that being targeted online is linked to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.
- 6) Garcia, R. A. et al. in their work in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018. This research gives voice to the real-life experiences of young people dealing with cyberbullying. Through personal stories, it captures the emotional challenges they face and highlights the personalized ways they cope, underlining the need for interventions that reflect these diverse experiences.
- 7) Lee, H. et al. in their research of *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 2017. Focusing on legal responses, this study compares anti-cyberbullying legislation in various countries. It looks at how effective these laws are and discusses ongoing issues, offering a roadmap for improving how the law tackles cyberbullying.
- 8) Chen, Y. et al. in their study of *Journal of Social Issues*, 2020. This research zeroes in on cyberbullying as it happens on social media platforms. By studying user behavior online, it identifies unique patterns of harassment and suggests ways that social media companies can create more protective and responsive environments.
- 9) Brown, L. M. et al. in their study of *Developmental Psychology*, 2016. Following teens over a period of years, this study uncovers both immediate and long-term mental health consequences of cyberbullying. It shows that the effects can persist well into the future, underlining the need for consistent psychological support for affected youth.
- 10) Martinez, G. R. et al. in their work in *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2018. This study



looks at how bystanders—those who witness cyberbullying—can play a role in stopping it. It highlights situations where peer intervention helped de-escalate online abuse and points to the potential of empowering witnesses as a powerful tool in prevention.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of researching cyberbullying and its psychological impact extends far beyond individual experiences. It plays a critical role in shaping our understanding across several spheres, including mental health, public awareness, education systems, and even legal frameworks. Below are the key areas where this study holds significance:

- **Promoting Individual Well-being**

One of the core contributions of this research is the empowerment of individuals—victims, peers, and educators alike—through awareness. By delving into how cyberbullying affects mental health, the study equips people with the knowledge to identify emotional distress and take proactive steps. When individuals better understand the signs and consequences of online harassment, they're more likely to seek support, offer help, or take preventive action.

- **Raising Societal Awareness**

This study helps bring cyberbullying into public conversations, not just academic circles. By compiling insights from various research efforts, it provides a well-rounded picture of the issue that can be understood by the public, policymakers, and advocacy organizations. Increased societal awareness can promote empathy and drive collaborative efforts to address cyberbullying on a broader scale.

- **Shaping Educational Policies**

Schools are often the first line of defense against cyberbullying. This research offers valuable insight into what's working and what's not when it comes to school-based prevention programs. The findings can support the design of more effective policies that include digital safety education, teacher training, and student-focused interventions aimed at creating safer online spaces.

- **Empowering Bystanders to Act**

The role of bystanders is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of cyberbullying. This study highlights how peer intervention can help reduce harm. Encouraging bystanders to step up and support victims doesn't just stop one instance—it helps foster a sense of community and shared responsibility, making online environments more inclusive and supportive.

- **Informing Legal and Ethical Frameworks**

Finally, the research provides a global look at how different countries handle cyberbullying from a legal perspective. By comparing these approaches, it offers valuable insights into what laws are effective and where improvements are needed. Policymakers can use this information to revise or create legislation that better responds to the digital challenges of today's world.

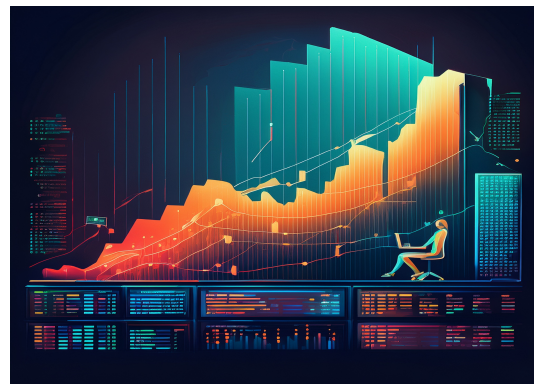


Fig. 3: Cyberbullying

VII. IMPLICATIONS OF CYBERBULLYING ON MENTAL HEALTH

The psychological consequences of cyberbullying extend far beyond the digital space, deeply affecting individuals' emotional, mental, and social well-being. Understanding these effects is crucial for developing effective support mechanisms and preventive strategies. Key implications include:

- **Increased Risk of Anxiety and Depression**

Victims of cyberbullying frequently experience heightened psychological distress. The constant threat or recurrence of online harassment can foster chronic anxiety and contribute to the development



of depressive symptoms. The emotional strain often becomes overwhelming, leading to persistent sadness, fear, and helplessness.

- **Negative Impact on Self-Esteem**

Online abuse—such as name-calling, humiliation, and character attacks—can significantly erode an individual's self-worth. Over time, repeated exposure to these harmful behaviors can instill deep-seated feelings of inadequacy, shame, and a distorted self-image.

- **Isolation and Social Withdrawal**

Fear of further victimization often drives individuals to withdraw from social interactions, both online and offline. This self-imposed isolation may lead to loneliness and a sense of social disconnection, further exacerbating feelings of sadness and vulnerability.

- **Suicidal Ideation and Self-Harm**

In extreme cases, the relentless nature of cyberbullying can push victims toward suicidal thoughts or self-harming behaviors. The emotional pain inflicted by constant digital abuse, coupled with feelings of hopelessness and entrapment, can result in severe psychological crises.

- **Impact on Academic Performance**

Cyberbullying can interfere with a student's ability to concentrate, engage, and perform academically. The emotional burden often manifests in lower productivity, absenteeism, and declining academic results, particularly when the bullying occurs within a school-related social context.

VIII. CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

This research significantly enhances the academic and practical understanding of cyberbullying and its effects on mental health. The following points highlight its contributions:

- **Nuanced Understanding of Cyberbullying Typologies**

By categorizing various forms of cyberbullying—such as direct harassment, doxxing, impersonation, and hate speech—this study provides a clearer framework for identifying and responding to different cyberbullying behaviors. These refined

typologies offer researchers, educators, and policy-makers a more targeted approach to recognition and intervention.

- **Comprehensive Analysis of Psychological Effects**

Through an in-depth review of existing literature, this study offers a detailed exploration of the psychological aftermath of cyberbullying. It draws clear connections between online victimization and conditions such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, adding depth to our understanding of the mental health risks involved.

- **Intersectional Perspectives**

This research emphasizes how factors such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and existing mental health conditions influence individuals' experiences with cyberbullying. It sheds light on the compounded challenges faced by vulnerable populations, thereby encouraging more inclusive and sensitive intervention strategies.

- **Exploration of Coping Mechanisms**

Beyond identifying harm, the study explores how victims cope—highlighting resilience, social support systems, and personal strategies that help mitigate the psychological impact. These findings inform the development of recovery-focused mental health programs.

- **Assessment of Prevention and Intervention Strategies**

By evaluating the effectiveness of current educational programs, platform regulations, and legal frameworks, the research offers evidence-based recommendations for improvement. These insights are instrumental in shaping future anti-cyberbullying initiatives across institutions and digital platforms.

IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this research provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Sampling Bias**

The generalizability of findings may be affected by the sample composition. If certain demographics are overrepresented, results may not accurately reflect the broader population's experiences.

- **Self-Reporting and Recall Bias**

Data collection based on self-reporting can be influenced by participants' perceptions or memory inaccuracies. Individuals may unintentionally misreport incidents due to trauma, embarrassment, or social desirability.

• Cross-Sectional Research Design

As a cross-sectional study, the research captures a moment-in-time perspective. This limits the ability to assess long-term effects or establish definitive causal relationships between cyberbullying and mental health outcomes.

X. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a multifaceted and deeply concerning picture of how cyberbullying impacts mental health. As our lives become increasingly entwined with digital spaces, understanding and addressing the psychological risks of online harassment is more important than ever. Key takeaways include:

Enduring Psychological Impact: Cyberbullying has far-reaching emotional consequences that often persist long after the incidents end. Long-term mental health support is essential for recovery.

Diverse and Intersectional Experiences: Different groups face unique challenges, emphasizing the need for tailored prevention and support systems.

Resilience and Coping Strategies: Despite the adversity, many victims exhibit resilience. Highlighting and nurturing these strengths can aid in healing.

Need for Effective Prevention: Schools, social media platforms, and legal systems must work collaboratively to enforce protective measures and foster safe digital environments.

Future Research Directions: There is a critical need for longitudinal studies to explore the long-term mental health effects and evaluate the ongoing evolution of cyberbullying in emerging digital platforms.

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