

Cyberbullying Among Children: Exploring Causes and Effects

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Abstract:

This research paper seeks to explore the causes and effects of cyberbullying on children. With the widespread use of modern communication tools like smartphones and mobile computers, individuals can easily create websites, facilitating entry into the world of cybercrimes. This unrestricted access exposes children to numerous risks, including cyberbullying, which endangers both their mental well-being and overall safety. Cyberbullying, an extension of traditional social bullying, can have severe psychological impacts on children, with potential long-term consequences that may even lead to physical harm.

The research begins by defining cyberbullying and then reviews several studies that examine its causes. It further explores the different forms and patterns of cyberbullying, highlighting the underlying factors that contribute to this behavior and its associated effects. The paper also presents relevant statistics and suggests preventive measures. The study concludes with a summary of key findings.

Keywords: Causes; Children; Cyberbullying; Cybercrimes; Effects; Internet.

1- Introduction

The Internet is one of the most recent technologies to emerge from modern information and communication advancements, serving as a primary source for accessing information across various fields such as social, economic, commercial, and educational. It has also played a significant role in bringing the world closer together by enabling individuals from different parts of the globe to connect through social networking platforms like Facebook, online chat forums, and email. However, with the widespread accessibility of this technology and the increased use of social networking sites across different age groups, several problems have arisen, negatively impacting the psychological and physical health of individuals—particularly children, who are the most vulnerable members of society. Additionally, children are the most vulnerable to exploitation by older individuals and the least aware of the potential problems and harms that this technology can cause. One of the most concerning issues is cyberbullying, which is defined as behaviour involving repeated harm inflicted on others through the use of

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electronic devices, such as smartphones, tablets—currently the most commonly used devices—and computers. This harmful behaviour is influenced by various factors, including family dynamics, peer relationships, and the level of skill in using communication and media technologies. Cyberbullying has significant effects on children's mental health and social relationships, which we will explore in this research.

This leads us to the following questions:

- a) What is cyberbullying?
- b) What are the reasons for the rise of cyberbullying among children?
- c) What are the effects of cyberbullying on children?

2– Concepts of the study

2.1– Bullying

2.1.1– Linguistic Definition:

The term "bullying" is derived from the word meaning a person who resembles a tiger in nature. It refers to someone who takes away another's rights or attempts to intimidate their peers by mimicking a tiger's ferocity. A boy who engages in bullying is likened to a lion (Al-Wajeez, 2011, p. 365).

2.1.2– Technical Definition:

"Bullying involves inflicting physical, psychological, emotional, or verbal harm on one or more individuals. It also includes threatening physical harm with a weapon, extortion, violating civil rights, assault, working within gangs, attempted murder or threats, and sexual harassment." (Al-Subhiyan & Al-Qudah, 2013, p. 8)

2.1.3– Barton (2006) Definition:

Bullying is defined by three criteria: it is a deliberate and general act of aggression that may take physical, verbal, or electronic forms; it involves repeated aggression against victims; and it creates tension in social relationships (Al-Qahtani, 2023, p. 71).

2.2– The Child

The definition of a child varies depending on the field of study and perspective. In psychology, a child is defined as an individual from the end of breastfeeding until the onset of puberty. In legal terms, a child is considered any individual who has not yet reached the age of eighteen (Bayoussef, 2016, p. 440).

A child is described as "an organic, biological, and social being, equipped with multiple senses and the ability to move more freely than other animals. A child is distinguished by higher mental faculties, enabling them to learn, read, remember, think, cooperate with others, and compete with them." (Kadri, 2013–2014, p. 154)

In summary, a child is an individual from the moment of birth until reaching adulthood.

2.3– The Internet

2.3.1– Linguistic Definition:

The word "Internet" is derived from the English term "international network." It is composed of two parts: "inter," an abbreviation for "international," and "net," an abbreviation for "network." (Al-Razqi, 2018)

2.3.2– Technical Definition:

The Internet is often used to describe the broader concept of virtual space, of which it is the primary component. It refers to a boundless and barrier-free domain that encompasses computer systems and electronic networks, where information is stored electronically and direct communications occur over the network. (Al-Minshawi)

It is also defined as "a network that enables uncensored, two-way mass communication." (Al-Mahdawi, 2007, p. 28)

Al-Shahri describes the Internet as a global information channel that has achieved technical integration and fusion between various means of communication. (Al-Mahdawi, 2007, p. 28)

2.4– Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as remote harassment and intimidation using electronic communication methods, aiming to create a psychological atmosphere of threat and anxiety in the victim (Al-Makanin, 2017, p. 188). It is also described as repeated behaviour intended to harm another person physically, verbally, socially, or sexually, often involving control, humiliation, and the pursuit of illegitimate gains through social media (Al-Ammar, 2016, p. 227). Additionally, cyberbullying involves sending or publishing harmful texts or images via the Internet or other electronic devices (Al-Atal, 2021, p. 288). (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011, p. 92) characterize cyberbullying as an intentional act designed to cause embarrassment, hurt, or belittlement. From these perspectives, it is evident that cyberbullying is an educational problem arising from psychological disorders within the individual, an educational deficiency within the family, or the negative reactions a child receives from their community. Researchers also note that an individual's ability to control electronic means often leads to the bullying and mocking of others.

3– Previous Studies

3.1– Foreign Studies

Several studies have focused on investigating the causes of exposure to cyberbullying, particularly the increasing use of the Internet and social networking sites. In a study conducted by Arslan, Savaser, Coburn, Connolly, and Roesch (2015), it was found that social factors, such as the inability to communicate effectively with others, family problems, and a history of sexual or material abuse, contribute to the likelihood of being targeted by cyberbullying. Additionally, Crossline (2014) identified the ending of romantic relationships as another significant factor leading to cyberbullying.

In a study by Meter and Bauman (2015), which followed a sample of middle school students over two different time periods, it was found that participating in a larger number of social networking sites increases the risk of exposure to cyberbullying. Factors such as exchanging passwords with others and joining unknown groups also contributed to this increased risk. Similarly, research by Rost, Stahel, and Frey (2016) revealed that anonymity online encourages users to engage in violent behaviour, with anonymous individuals displaying more aggression than those with clear identities. Additionally, a field study conducted by Grozig and Frumkin (2013) on a probability sample of children aged 6–19 years found that bullies often suffer from psychological problems or seek to make others feel as they do. Monks, Mahdavi, and Rix (2016) further explored the opinions of parents and teachers on the causes of cyberbullying, concluding that one of the most significant factors is the increasing computer skills of children.

3.2– Arabic Studies

Yasser Hussein's study on cyberbullying and its impact on adolescents (2023) aimed to identify the key manifestations of societal bullying and the significant reasons behind why some individuals engage in bullying behaviour. The research also explored the effects of electronic bullying on adolescents and examined the relationship between bullying, electronic tools, and the adolescent phase. Utilizing a descriptive analytical approach, the study offered several recommendations: families should focus on raising children with the skills to handle problems flexibly; educational institutions should adopt curricula that promote values of tolerance and acceptance, especially towards those who are different; and there should be increased awareness of the role of psychological specialists and the importance of seeking their help when a child is bullied. Additionally, the study emphasized the need for awareness regarding the proper use of social media and media literacy to combat bullying.

The study by Dahmani Fatima Zahra and Boussaada Maryam, titled “The Reality of Cyberbullying among Middle School Students (A Field Study on Third-Year Middle School Students at Sari Mustafa Middle School – Tlemcen Province)” (2023), investigated the prevalence of cyberbullying among a random sample of 87 male and female third-year middle school students. The research aimed to assess the level of cyberbullying among these students and to explore any differences in prevalence between genders. Using a descriptive approach and Dr. Amani Al-Shennawi’s (2014) cyberbullying scale, the study found a low level of cyberbullying among the participants and no statistically significant differences in prevalence between male and female students. The researchers recommended increasing awareness of the risks associated with social media platforms, enhancing family monitoring, and taking full responsibility for educating children about these risks.

Randa Mohammed Al-Maghribi's study, titled "The Reality of the Phenomenon of Cyberbullying Among Early Childhood Children During Distance Education in Light of the Corona Pandemic," aimed to identify the causes and forms of cyberbullying among young children during remote learning amid the pandemic. Utilizing a descriptive approach, the study employed two scales: the first focused on forms of cyberbullying, including parental treatment methods during distance education, the use of electronic educational games, and internet usage during remote learning; the second addressed the causes of cyberbullying, such as electronic harassment and threats, electronic ostracism/exclusion, and defamation of reputation. The sample comprised 136 mothers of early childhood children who experienced cyberbullying. The results indicated that the primary causes of cyberbullying were parental treatment methods during distance education, followed by the use of electronic educational games, with internet use during remote learning being the least significant. The study also found that the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying were electronic harassment and threats, followed by electronic ostracism/exclusion, with defamation being least common. Statistically significant differences were found between the causes of cyberbullying and the mother's employment status, with non-working mothers being associated with higher levels of cyberbullying ($t = 13.401$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, a strong positive correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.945$, $p < 0.01$) was observed between the causes and forms of cyberbullying among early childhood children.

Hassnia Hussein Abdel Rahman's study, titled "A Proposed Vision to Overcome Electronic Bullying in Primary Schools in the Arab Republic of Egypt in Light of the Experiences of Australia, Finland, and the United States of America" (2008), aimed to

develop strategies to address cyberbullying in Egyptian primary schools by drawing insights from international experiences. The research sought to:

- Identify the intellectual framework related to cyberbullying based on contemporary educational literature.
- Examine Australia's approach to combating cyberbullying.
- Explore Finland's methods for overcoming cyberbullying.
- Present the strategies employed in the United States to tackle cyberbullying.
- Assess the current state of cyberbullying in primary schools in Egypt.
- Propose a vision for addressing cyberbullying in Egyptian primary schools, informed by the experiences of Australia, Finland, and the United States.

To achieve these goals, the researcher used a comparative approach, employing both comparative analytical and case study methods. The study was applied to a sample of 420 students from primary, middle, and secondary schools in Cairo and Qalyubia Governorates, aged between 11 and 18 years, using a cyberbullying scale. The findings revealed that middle school students experienced the highest levels of cyberbullying, particularly through phone calls, followed by primary and secondary school students. Notably, third-year middle school girls in Minya Governorate, aged 15–16, reported higher levels of cyberbullying, indicating that it had a more severe impact on them compared to their male counterparts.

The study by Raja Bouzidi and Mustafa Mostafawi, titled "The Reality of Cyberbullying Among Algerian Youth – A Field Study on a Sample of 30 Male and Female University Students" (2022), aimed to explore the phenomenon of cyberbullying among Algerian youth. The research sought to identify the forms and motives behind cyberbullying, the most commonly used methods, and the impact and severity of this issue.

To achieve these objectives, the researchers employed a field research method and conducted interviews as the primary data collection tool. The study revealed several key findings:

4– Results and Discussion

4.1– Forms of Cyberbullying:

The most prevalent form of cyberbullying was mockery, followed by harassment and repeated insults. Defamation and exclusion were identified as less common, while incitement and threats were the least frequently reported types of cyberbullying.

4.2– Perceptions and Impact:

Youth perceptions indicated that cyberbullying is a social issue that has evolved from general social behaviour into a form of communication with specific symbols and meanings. It is seen as a new cultural phenomenon characterized by its widespread, repetitive, and evolving nature, which poses significant challenges for individual confrontation.

This study aligns with the findings of Arslan, Savaser, Coburn, Connolly, and Roesch (2015), Rost, Stahel, and Frey (2016), Grozig and Frumkin (2013), and Monks, Mahdavi, and Rix (2016) regarding the causes of cyberbullying. All these studies agree that cyberbullying via social media is often the result of psychological disorders, social and family issues, or the bully's proficiency in using technological tools.

It also shares objectives with Yasser Hussein's study (2023), which examines the causes and effects of cyberbullying, particularly among adolescents. Hussein's research focuses on adolescents' unique developmental stage, marked by significant physical, psychological, and social changes, which makes them more susceptible to negative influences from family, society, and technology.

In contrast, the study by Dahmani Fatima Zahra and Boussada Maryam (2022) differs by focusing on the prevalence of cyberbullying among male and female students and does not delve deeply into the underlying causes. Meanwhile, Randa Mohammed Al-Maghribi's study (2023) also investigates causes but centres on early childhood, emphasizing the impact of family and electronic media, whereas Hassnia Hussein Abdel Rahman's study (2008) aims to develop strategies to combat cyberbullying through comparisons with international experiences.

Finally, the study by Raja Bouzidi and Mustafa Mostafawi (2022) is similar in its investigation of the motives behind cyberbullying among young people, reflecting the broader context of understanding and addressing this phenomenon.

5– Cyberbullying

5.1– Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying manifests in various forms, including harassment, defamation, impersonation, disclosing secrets, prankster behaviour, exclusion, and cyberstalking. Harassment involves sending offensive and insulting messages through platforms like Messenger or email. Defamation refers to spreading rumours or false information about someone to damage their reputation. Impersonation occurs when a bully pretends to be someone else to post harmful content that jeopardizes another person's reputation.

Disclosing secrets involves sharing private information or photos online to embarrass someone. A prankster engages in coaxing others into revealing embarrassing information or secrets, which are then shared widely. Exclusion involves intentionally excluding someone from online groups. Cyberstalking includes repeated harassment, defamation, and threats, such as hacking personal accounts. (Hussein, 2016, p. 57)

5.2– Patterns of Cyberbullying

Some researchers classify cyberbullying patterns based on the methods used into two main categories: direct and indirect bullying (Al-Atal, 2021).

5.2.1– Direct bullying

It includes behaviours such as using the Internet or cell phones to threaten or insult someone, deliberately sending files with viruses, or transmitting obscene or threatening images.

5.2.2– Indirect bullying

On the other hand, occurs covertly, without the victim's immediate awareness. This can involve actions like browsing someone's email without permission, pretending to be someone else online, or posting offensive material about others through mobile phones, email, or chat programs.

The phenomenon of force and violence among peers is not new to educational settings and can be considered a normal behaviour that, while correctable, presents significant challenges when it becomes widespread and pathological. Addressing cyberbullying effectively requires educational interventions to mitigate its severity and impact. Several factors contribute to the occurrence of cyberbullying:

5.3– Reasons behind Cyberbullying

Psychological Reasons: Psychologists suggest that bullying behaviour often stems from psychological disorders. Sigmund Freud theorized that aggression is a natural extension of internal psychological energy. According to Freud, individuals possess two primary instincts—love and aggression. Aggressive behaviour, including cyberbullying, manifests as an attempt to satisfy this internal drive, especially when individuals perceive external threats (Alraqqas, 2021, pp. 451–452).

5.3.1– Exposure to Violent Media:

Children who spend long hours playing violent video games or watching violent films may develop hostile tendencies, which can translate into cyberbullying behaviours.

5.3.2– Family Dysfunction:

Families where parents focus solely on meeting material needs and neglect educational guidance may contribute to the development of bullying behaviour. Effective parenting requires not only providing for material needs but also engaging in behavioural correction and positive upbringing.

5.3.3– Violence in the Home and Community:

Children exposed to violence within their homes or broader communities are likely to adopt violent behaviours. This exposure can include witnessing violence within the family or in environments where societal instability has weakened security measures.

5.3.4– Peer Influence:

The dynamics within peer groups, including peer rejection, hatred, and association with antisocial individuals, can increase the likelihood of cyberbullying. Just as in real life, negative interactions within virtual communities can amplify the incidence of cyberbullying.

5.3.5– School Environment:

Increasing violence among students and between students and teachers, coupled with a decline in teacher authority, can foster a culture of bullying. The school climate, which encompasses unwritten beliefs, values, and attitudes, also influences behaviour. Poor mutual respect, strained relationships, and mistreatment within the school setting can contribute to inappropriate expressions of aggression through social media.

5.4– Types of Bullying

According to Mubarak Mokrani's study, "Cyberbullying and its Relationship to Social Anxiety" (Mokrani, 2018), cyberbullying can be categorized into several types based on the methods used:

5.4.1– Written Bullying:

This form involves verbal or written abuse through channels like phone calls, text messages, and email.

5.4.2– Visual Bullying:

This includes attacks using visual elements, such as posting embarrassing or harmful pictures online.

5.4.3– Exclusion:

This type involves deliberately excluding someone from online groups, chats, or blocking them from social media platforms.

5.4.4– Identity Theft:

This involves the unauthorized use of someone else's identity, which can include accessing personal information or using another person's account.

6– Effects of Cyberbullying

The effects of cyberbullying are often more severe than traditional bullying, as the victim may find it difficult to escape the abuse. These effects can manifest in various ways, including increased stress, heightened depression, and mood swings. Victims may also experience worsening anxiety, sleep disturbances, restlessness, and even suicidal thoughts or attempts. The sense of fear can intensify, leading to low self-esteem and isolation, with individuals withdrawing from friends or spending excessive time alone. Activities that were once enjoyable might be avoided, and academic performance may decline. Cyberbullying can also strain relationships with family and friends, and lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, and substance abuse. Additionally, victims may experience heightened anger, irritability, and more frequent temper outbursts. (Masoud, 2023)

7– Cyberbullying Statistics

Research shows that approximately 43% of children who use the internet have been bullied, with a quarter of them experiencing it frequently. Among middle school students, 70% have faced repeated incidents of cyberbullying. Around 58% of children admit to being targeted with harmful language online, with more than 4 in 10 reporting that this has occurred multiple times. Some websites allow users to share their experiences and problems, offering discussions with specialists across various fields. These sites have revealed alarming statistics about the prevalence of cyberbullying, though specific figures for Arab countries are unavailable. As of 2019 and earlier, 48.7% of Asian students reported having embarrassing videos posted about them, with children aged 13 to 15 being the most vulnerable. However, only 38% of these children inform their parents about such incidents (Arageek, 2023).

In a study by Ming Ji Wang and others (2019), referred to by (Refai, 2021), titled *Exploring Gender, Ethnicity, and Age Differences in the Prevalence of Cyberbullying*, a field study was conducted on a national sample of New Zealanders aged 18 and older. The study aimed to examine differences in online victimization based on gender, age, and ethnicity. It found that approximately 14.9% of respondents had been victims of cyberbullying, with 2.2% reporting recent experiences. Young adults aged 17–25 experienced the highest levels of cyberbullying across all time periods. Additionally, the study revealed that cyberbullying was less prevalent among older groups, and there were

slight differences between men and women, with women generally reporting slightly higher exposure than men.

8– Ways to combat and prevent Cyberbullying

- Take precautions and activate security features in all your applications and accounts.
- Avoid publicly sharing personal vulnerabilities (e.g., being home alone) that others might exploit.
- Respect your privacy by sharing thoughtful details, not your every move.
- Communicate respectfully with others, especially about sensitive topics like family matters.
- Build positive relationships with trustworthy people.
- Never engage in bullying, no matter how easy or tempting it may seem.
- If you don't want something shared online, don't post it—this choice is entirely yours.

(Buckie, 2013)

9– Conclusion

Bullying, whether in person or online, is a problem that causes psychological, physiological, social, and physical harm. This issue has become more serious as it has taken on an electronic form. Through the hacking procedure, the criminal can gain access to the victim's social media profile and change it as he sees fit, with the added benefit of masking his identity. He can disseminate films, words, and information, or sabotage anything relating to the victim. It is difficult to trace the culprit, so we must focus on building programs to combat cyberbullies rather than disclosing anything private that bullies might exploit for their own profit.

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