



Internalizing Factors and The Perils of Cyberbullying: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying, a novel shape of bullying that occurs via electronic means, has become a worldwide concern among adolescents and young adults. This review investigates the connection between cyberbullying and internalizing factors: anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide ideation and low self-esteem. The anonymity and accessibility of the internet all round the clock makes cyberbullying extremely challenging and pervasive as compared to traditional bullying, thereby increasing the risk of victims developing internalizing problems. The effects of cyberbullying victimization on internalizing factors may be mediated by a number of factors, such as social support, coping strategies, and resilience. Given the severe effects of cyberbullying on mental health, it is crucial to address this issue and offer victims support to promote their well-being. This review emphasizes the need for sustained research on the connection between cyberbullying and internalizing factors and the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, victimization, internalizing factors, depression, anxiety, suicide ideation

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs via digital devices like computers, smartphones, and tablets. It involves repeated and deliberate aggressive behavior, including threats, humiliation, and harassment, directed at an individual or group via electronic communication channels, such as social media platforms, messaging apps, and online gaming platforms. [1, 2]. Cyberbullying is a growing concern; children and young adults are especially susceptible to its effects with the increased use of technology and social media platforms, cyberbullying has become considerably more prevalent. The rising popularity of social media as well as technology has led to an increase in cyberbullying. Due to the anonymity and accessibility of the Internet, cyberbullying may be more severe and pervasive than traditional bullying, thereby increasing the risk of psychological distress among its victims. [3] It is crucial to address the growing issue of cyberbullying and facilitate victims in enhancing their psychological well-being and mental health. According to study, interventions such as therapy or counselling can benefit victims of cyberbullying. [4]. Additionally, raising awareness about the effects of cyberbullying and educating individuals about appropriate online behavior may be effective in preventing cyberbullying victimization [1].

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CYBERBULLYING

As technology has advanced and new forms of digital communication have emerged, the definition of cyberbullying has shifted over time. Some researchers have highlighted the need to consider the distinctive features cyberbullying, such as its anonymity, accessibility, and ability to reach a wide range of people. [5, 6]. Others have asserted that cyberbullying is another kind of traditional bullying and claim that the two share similar characteristics, namely power disparity, repetition, and intentionality. [7]. Despite conceptual differences, researchers agree that cyberbullying is a severe problem that can negatively affect its victims' mental health and well-being [5]. In order to effectively prevent and address this form of abuse, it is essential to continue developing a clear and exhaustive conceptualization of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant concern for educators, parents, and healthcare professionals over the past decade, as its prevalence has increased significantly. Cyberbullying, with its specific features such as being intentional and repeated harm perpetrated on individuals via electronic technology, can take many forms, including spreading falsehoods, making threats, and posting humiliating photographs or videos. [8].

Cyberbullying can occur 24/7 and can reach a much larger audience than traditional forms of bullying, making it more challenging to flee or avoid [1].

There are various kinds of ways in which perpetrators cyberbully their victims online. Below are a few ways cyberbullying has been reported in recent years.

- Impersonation involves establishing false profiles and assuming the identity of another person online. This can result in disseminating detrimental and inaccurate information about the victim.
- Exclusion is the deliberate exclusion of a person from online groups or conversations, leaving them feeling isolated and outcast.
- Outing: Sharing private or humiliating information about someone online without their consent constitutes outing. The victim may experience humiliation and disgrace as a result.
- Cyberstalking involves following individuals online, monitoring their activities, and sending them menacing communications. This can be especially terrifying for the victim.
- Sexting entails the transmission of sexually explicit images or text messages. This can result in humiliation and disgrace for the victim, especially if the images are shared without their permission.

According to studies, cyberbullying can have an enormous effect on the psychological well-being and mental state of its victims. [9, 10]. It is essential to identify and resolve the various forms of cyberbullying in order to prevent damage to individuals and encourage secure and respectful online behaviour.

CYBERBULLYING AND INTERNALIZATION

Cyberbullying can result in severe negative outcomes, such as internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety, somatic symptoms, self-harm and suicide ideation. Internalizing symptoms are characterized by inwardly directed negative emotions and can significantly impact a person's mental health and well-being [11]. Depression, for example, is a mood disorder which is characterized by feelings of sorrow, hopelessness and worthlessness, and it can significantly impact an individual's quality of life [12]. In contrast, anxiety is a state of concern or disquiet frequently accompanied by physical symptoms, including restlessness, fatigue, and muscle tension [13]. Both depression and anxiety can have detrimental effects on the academic, social, and emotional functioning of an individual and if left untreated, can contribute to long-term mental health issues. Several studies have investigated the correlation between cyberbullying victimization and internalizing symptoms, focusing on depression and anxiety. For example, research discovered that cyberbullying victimization was positively associated with depressive symptoms among Korean adolescents [14]. Similarly, another research found that cyberbullying victimization among Chinese adolescents significantly predicted depression and anxiety [4]. In addition, a meta-analysis revealed that cyberbullying victimization was associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression, even after controlling for other factors such as traditional bullying victimization [15]. While research has consistently found a correlation between cyberbullying victimization and internalizing symptoms, further investigation is required to determine the nature of this correlation and the factors that may mediate or moderate it. Some studies have suggested, for instance, that social support may mitigate the negative effects of cyberbullying victimization on mental health [16]. Other research has examined the role of coping strategies, such as problem-solving and emotion regulation, in mitigating the effects of cyberbullying victimization on internalizing symptoms [17]. Cyberbullying victimization is a severe problem that can result in negative mental health outcomes, such as melancholy and anxiety. While research has provided valuable insights into the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and internalizing symptoms, additional research is required to identify protective factors and effective interventions for preventing and addressing the detrimental effects of cyberbullying victimization on mental health.

CYBERBULLYING AND DEPRESSION

Cyberbullying has recently become a significant concern among young adults and adolescents. It refers to the use of electronic medium to torment, harass, or intimidate, someone. The relationship between cyberbullying and mental health outcomes, such as depression, has been the subject of increasing research. Multiple studies have discovered a correlation between cyberbullying and melancholy. For instance, a study also revealed that cyberbullying victims were more likely to report depressive symptoms than the non-victims [18]. Similarly, research has found that adolescents who had experienced cyberbullying were more depressed than those who had not [19]. In addition, it was found in a longitudinal study that students who reported experiencing cyberbullying had an increased risk of developing depression over time [20]. This suggests that the negative effects of cyberbullying on mental health of the individuals may be long-lasting and persistent. The social isolation and exclusion frequently accompanying cyberbullying may account for the link between cyberbullying and depression. According to the "belongingness theory" [21], social exclusion is a potent stressor that can provoke negative affective responses, such as depression.

Another study [22] between cyberbullying victimization and depression in adolescents discovered a significant positive correlation wherein 2,734 American middle and high school students participated in the study. Even though other variables such as gender, age, and traditional bullying victimization were controlled, the study found that cyberbullying victimization was a significant predictor of depression level. Likewise, researchers investigated the correlation between cyberbullying and depression among Chinese adolescents. The study included 2,273 pupils aged 10 to 18 years old. The study's results revealed a correlation between cyberbullying victimization and depression level. The relationship between cyberbullying and depression was also found to be mediated by perceived social support [4]. In addition, a study [23] examined the relationship between cyberbullying and mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, among adolescents in a meta-analysis. The meta-analysis comprised 36 investigations with 319,175 participants in total. The meta-analysis revealed a significant correlation between cyberbullying victimization and mental health issues, including depression. The relationship between cyberbullying and depression was also stronger for female adolescents than for the adolescents. Even after controlling for other variables, cyberbullying victimization is consistently associated with depression, according to numerous studies. To prevent mental health issues such as depression in adolescents, it is essential to resolve cyberbullying-related issues.

CYBERBULLYING AND SOMATIC SYMPTOMS

Cyberbullying victimization has also been associated with a variety of adverse outcomes which include somatic symptoms which are defined as a cluster of signs that medical conditions, such as headaches, stomach aches, and fatigue cannot entirely explain. Several studies in the past have investigated the association between cyberbullying victimization and somatic symptoms among adolescents. For instance, research discovered that adolescents who were victims of cyberbullying reported higher levels of somatic symptoms than those who were not cyberbullying victims. A sample of 5,700 middle and high school pupils from the United States participated in the study. Even after controlling for other variables, such as gender and age, the frequency of cyberbullying victimization significantly predicted somatic symptoms, according to the study's findings [24]. Similarly, research has also investigated the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and somatic symptoms among Canadian adolescents. It included 1,009 students aged 11 to 18 as participants. The results of the study revealed a correlation between cyberbullying victimization and somatic symptoms. It was also found that the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and somatic symptoms was also more significant for female adolescents than male adolescents [6].

CYBERBULLYING AND ANXIETY

Cyberbullying victimization, which refers to the experience of being targeted, hounded, or bullied online, has been associated with a variety of adverse outcomes, including anxiety. Anxiety refers to feelings of unease, concern, or dread that can impair a person's daily functioning. Multiple studies have found correlation between cyberbullying victimization and anxiety among adolescents. According to a study [4], cyberbullying victimization was substantially associated with elevated anxiety levels among Chinese adolescents. The study included 1,677 pupils aged 11 to 17 as participants. Both the prevalence and severity of cyberbullying victimization were positively correlated with anxiety levels, according to the results of the study. Similarly, a study investigated the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and anxiety among middle school students and high school students of America. The study included 5,700 student participants. The study's results revealed that students who were victims of cyberbullying reported higher levels of anxiety than those who were not. According to the study, the association between cyberbullying victimization and anxiety was stronger for female students than for male students [2].

CYBERBULLYING AND SELF-HARM

The relationship between cyberbullying victimization and self-harm has been the subject of numerous studies. Cyberbullied individuals are more likely to engage in acts of self-harm such as cutting, burning, and other forms of self-injury, according to research [18, 25]. One study found that cyberbullied adolescents were more likely to indulge in self-harm than those who were not cyberbullied. [26]. Another study noted a correlation between cyberbullying victimization and an elevated risk of suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviours. [27]. The link between cyberbullying and self-harm may be due to the detrimental effects cyberbullying can have on mental health, including increased anxiety, melancholy, and social isolation [28]. Cyberbullying victims may also experience feelings of helplessness and lack of control, which may lead them to self-harm as a coping mechanism [26]. It is essential to address the issue of cyberbullying and provide support for victims in order to prevent self-harm and other negative outcomes associated with cyberbullying victimization. Counseling and psychotherapy may be useful in assisting cyberbullying

victims and averting self-harming behaviours [4]. In addition, efforts to raise awareness about the effects of cyberbullying and educate individuals about appropriate online conduct may be effective in preventing cyberbullying victimization and its associated negative outcomes [1]. The relationship between cyberbullying victimization and self-harm is a concerning issue that calls for additional research and attention in order to develop strategies for early detection and intervention.

CYBERBULLYING AND SUICIDE IDEATION

A number of studies have examined the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and suicidal ideation, emphasizing the potentially severe implications of this form of abuse. Suicide ideation refers to thoughts of self-harm or suicide and is a major risk factor for suicide attempts [29]. Cyberbullying can become more severe and persistent than traditional bullying, increasing the risk of suicidal ideation among victims [3]. According to a study [18] cyberbullying victims are far more likely to have suicidal thoughts than non-victims. Similarly, another research revealed discovered that cyberbullying victimization was substantially linked to suicidal ideation among adolescents [30]. Moreover, a meta-analysis [22] found that cyberbullying victimization was positively associated with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, even after controlling for other variables, such as traditional bullying victimization. The resulting effects of cyberbullying victimization on suicidal ideation may also be mediated by various factors such as depression and anxiety, according to previous research. For instance, research has also highlighted that depression mediated the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and suicidal ideation among adolescents [9]. Similarly, a study discovered that depression partially mediated the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and suicidal ideation among Chinese adolescents [4]. It is vital to understand the potentially serious consequences of cyberbullying victimization and to implement measures to prevent and address this form of abuse. Providing victims of cyberbullying with support, such as counselling or therapy, is one potential intervention. In addition, efforts to raise awareness about the effects of cyberbullying and educate individuals about appropriate online behaviour may be beneficial in preventing cyberbullying victimization [4]. According to research, cyberbullying victimization is positively associated with suicidal ideation, with depression and anxiety possibly mediating this relationship. It is crucial to address the issue of cyberbullying and provide victims with support to enhance their mental health and well-being.

CONCLUSION

The review offers an in-depth investigation of the repercussions of cyberbullying on internalizing factors such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The paper emphasizes that cyberbullying is a significant problem that can have devastating effects on individuals' mental health and well-being. Numerous investigations have discovered a correlation between cyberbullying victimization and internalizing factors. The paper also emphasizes the need for preventative and corrective cyberbullying interventions. One such intervention could be providing victims of cyberbullying with support, such as counselling or psychotherapy. In addition, efforts to raise awareness about the effects of cyberbullying and educating individuals about appropriate online behaviour may be beneficial in preventing cyberbullying victimization. The paper provides valuable insight into the intricate relationship between cyberbullying and internalizing factors. It emphasizes the need for additional research and the significance of devising effective interventions to combat this growing issue.

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