

CYBER BULLYING IN INDIA: CONSEQUENCES AND REMEDIES

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Introduction

Internet has changed every sphere of life, by bringing information available to vast strata of the society. Technology has made things so easy that People around the world can connect to each other with just click of the button. With the advancement in technology, all the activities of the world have been shifted to virtual world. People not only depend on internet for school, college projects but they use it for overcoming their frustration and aggression which is not possible in offline mode. Over the last decade, technology has become increasingly important in the lives of adolescents. Adolescents are heavy users of electronic communication such as instant messaging, e-mail, and text messaging. They are also heavy users of communication oriented internet sites such as blogs, social networking sites for sharing photos and videos. The internet offers connectivity to friends and family and access to information. However, as with other social environments, the potential to meet and interact with others in harmful ways exists. One such interaction of growing concern is called Cyber-Bullying. It has the long lasting impact as it hurts the self-image or threatens, or ha harms the privacy of an individual.

Bil Belsey, a Canadian educational advisor in 2004, coined the term cyber bullying to describe annoying, abusing, threatening or harassing of another person through electronic means. Cyber bullying is defined as harmful and intentional communication exploiting any form of technological device (Belsey, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Technology includes but is not limited to email, text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, cellular phones, camera phones, web sites, blogs and

social networks such as MySpace or Facebook (Brown, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2006). Unique aspects of cyber bullying are the potential anonymity of bullies and the infinite audience. A single incident can be viewed repeatedly and continuously (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyber bullies are often anonymous and can reach a victim 24 hours a day seven days a week regardless of location. Unlike face-to-face bullying, cyber bullying can be anonymous, pervasive, and instantaneous (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Bullies have a sense of disinhibiting and invincibility because the bully is faceless (Mason, 2008). Bullies can also reach a target in front of a larger audience (Dempsey et al., 2009) Using the internet, cell-phones, or other technology to send or post images or text messages intended to hurt or embarrass another person (Hinduja et.al. 2007). Cyber-bullying is “covert psychological bullying conveyed through the electronic mediums” (Shariff & Gouin 2007). Cyber-bullies are usually anonymous and hence in that aspect differ from normal bullying. Cyber bullying is the persistent harassment of an individual via technology like internet/ cellphone etc.

Difference between Traditional Bullying and Cyber Bullying

No doubt there are some similarities between traditional bullying and cyber bullying but, there are some important characteristics of cyber bullying that distinguish it from traditional bullying e.g, Traditional bullies are known by others in school or in the workplace. In most cases cyber bullying are anonymous. This aspect of cyber bullying makes it particularly hurtful. In traditional bullying children who are considered overweight, physical weak, disabled or unpopular are often targeted. Traditional bullying most often occurs in school or during the day. Cyber bullying can occur at any time, which may heighten children perceptions of vulnerability. Sending messages or uploading images through online mode can be seen by wider population. Interaction that can occur in virtual reality can affect the everyday reality that students experience elsewhere. One of the biggest differences between traditional bullying and cyber bullying is that the victim of traditional bullying can go home and get away from it all. With cyber bullying, as long as an individual has

either a cell phone or computer, they can still be bullied. Dooley, Pyzalski, and Cross (2009) describe cyber bullying as its own phenomenon because someone can be victimized day or night. Dooley et al. (2009) also stated that cyber bullying results in a power imbalance, where the victim has even less power than he or she would have in traditional bullying. With traditional bullying, a victim can predict when they are going to be bullied (e.g. at school or on the playground); however, with cyber bullying, the victim does not know when they are going to be bullied, or how (e.g. cell phone, computer), which leads to feeling even more powerless. Recent studies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Kowalski, Biumetti, Schroeder, & Lattaner, 2014; Popovic-Citic, Djuric, & Cvetkovic, 2011; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008) suggest that cyber bullying is pervasive and ranks as one of the most common form of harassment among adolescents. The medium through which adolescents communicate and socialize has changed dramatically in recent years. Despite its many benefits and increased possibilities for connectedness among people, the internet has become a haven for innovative forms of negative interpersonal behaviors that comprise what has been termed "cyber bullying." This often occurs via Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, text messaging, and instant messaging. There is often low awareness in parents that cyber bullying is taking place because its venues are hidden electronics, making it difficult for parents to monitor children's interactions (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Because traditional bullying and cyber bullying have their respective processes and Cyber bullying is a relatively new phenomenon. Kowalski and Limber (2013) Conducted a study on Psychological, Physical, and Academic Correlates of Cyber bullying and Traditional Bullying and results shows that Participants were categorized as belonging to one of four groups: cyber victims, cyber bullies, cyber bully/victims, and those not involved in cyber bullying. A similar categorization was done with traditional bullying. Those in the bully/victim groups (and particularly the cyber bully/victim group) had the most negative scores on most measures of psychological health, physical, health, and academic performance. There appears to be a substantial, although not perfect,

overlap between involvement in traditional bullying and cyber bullying. Additionally, the physical, psychological, and academic correlates of the two types of bullying resembled one another.

Forms of Cyber Bullying

There are many types of cyber bullying:

- Gossip: Posting or sending cruel gossip to damage a person's reputation and relationships with friends, family, and acquaintances.
- Exclusion: Deliberately excluding someone from an online group.
- Impersonation: Breaking into someone's e-mail or other online account and sending messages that will cause embarrassment or damage to the person's reputation and affect his or her relationship with others.
- Harassment: Repeatedly posting or sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages.
- Cyber stalking: Posting or sending unwanted or intimidating messages, which may include threats.
- Flaming: Online fights where scornful and offensive messages are posted on websites, forums, or blogs.
- Outing and Trickery: Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, this is then shared online. Outing is when a bully shares personal and private information, pictures, or videos about someone publicly. A person is "outed" when his information has been disseminated throughout the internet.
- Cyberthreats: Remarks on the Internet threatening or implying violent behavior, displaying suicidal tendencies.

Cyber Bullying Reports in India

A recent Microsoft study has found that over half of the Indian children who surf the Internet face cyber bullying, getting threatened or being harassed online. According to Microsoft's 'Global Youth Online Behavior Survey' (2012) of 25 countries, India ranked third with 53% of respondents (children aged between 8-17) saying they have been bullied online, behind China (70%) and Singapore (58%). The survey focused on how kids are treating one another online and whether parents are addressing online behaviors. In India, the survey found that more than five in 10 children surveyed said they have experienced what adults might consider online bullying. Globally, the survey indicated that while children want to talk to parents about the issue, only 29% of the children said their parents have talked to them about protecting themselves online. The survey said it was important for adults (parents and school officials) to discuss the issue with the children and provide guidance on how to identify and respond to a range of online behaviors from online meanness to bullying and beyond. Indian cyber law is still ineffective in delivering cyber-crime convictions, even as cyber fraud continues to increase. The year 2013 has seen a lot of events as far as cyber law jurisprudence in India are concerned. It has been an eventful year that demonstrated how cyber legal challenges are increasingly becoming relevant. As per the Google's Transparency Report, 2013, in the case of India, the number of user data requests rose by 16 per cent to 2,691 in January-June this year from 2,319 in the same period in 2012. As per the information reported to and tracked by Indian Computer Response Team (CERT-In), a total number of 308,371 websites of which 78 belonged to government were hacked between 2011 and 2013 (up to June).

According to McAfee's Tweens & Technology Report 2013 Indian tweens (kids aged between 8 to 12 years) are using between three to four devices that can be internet enabled. Around 53 percent of online tweens are online daily between one to three hours.

An article from India Today on Indian Kids worst victims of cyber bullying study and the survey done by Ipsos - a global market research company - found that 45% of Indian parents believed a child in their community was being cyber bullied , while a majority (53%) parents are aware of the issue. The poll surveyed 18,000 adults in 24 countries, 6,500 of whom were parents. It showed the most widely reported vehicle for cyber bullying was social networking sites like Facebook, which 60% cited. According to the talk of Biswarup Banerjee, head - marketing communications, Ipsos in India the frequency of Cyber bullying in India was higher than that of western nations, including the US (15%), Britain (11%) and France (5%). Prior to this survey, there has been little evidence to suggest Cyber bullying is a major issue in the country.

Consequences

The consequences of cyber bullying are adverse as it leads to depression, suicide, anxiety and low grades of students. In case of Ryan Halligan, a 13 year old school boy, who committed suicide after becoming a cyber-bullying victim. He used AOL instant messenger and became friends with the popular girl of the school. He ended up being in an online relationship with her. All this happened during the vacations before grade 8th. On joining the school, when he approached her, she called him a loser in front of everybody. She told him that everything she said online was a lie and had forwarded the messages to her friends for a laugh. Most of the children are scared of telling parents about them being bullied online. As per the research conducted by abcNews.com in September, 2006, 58% of kids have not told their parents or an adult about them being bullied online.¹¹ Parents can look for signs that match the following to know if their child is a victim of cyber bullying. The signs can be, fear in leaving the house, lack of appetite, low self-esteem, secretive about internet activities, close computer windows on your arrival, behavioral changes, aggression at home, decreased success, incomplete school work, unexplained pictures on their computer, crying for no reason, changes in the

dressing and other habits, lack interest in attending social gatherings where other students are also present, complaining sickness before any event in the community or at school, etc.

Remedies

Other than being dependent on technology for prevention of cyber bullying, teachers, parents, and students themselves need to take measures to prevent such offence. There can be advertisements on the effects of cyber bullying and its concept. Anti-ragging cells and also posters in the school can help to prevent it.³⁷ School authorities should make students understand the concept of cyber bullying, its consequences and effects. They should teach cyber ethics to the students and impart knowledge of laws against cyber bullying. Schools can prevent the same by organizing some activities or interactive sessions to give them the whole idea of cyber bullying. Schools should also include in the policy, their right to interfere in actions of a child off-campus which affects the children on-campus too. Parents should keep a check on the internet usage and activities of their child. They should also make some rules in the house related to internet usage. They should maintain healthy relations with the child and should encourage the child to tell them if they are being bullied.

Conclusion

Indian laws are competent and well drafted to punish traditional offences on the physical space. Some laws to punish offences on cyber space are well drafted to meet the ends of justice. The interesting aspect of cyber space is that it is growing and evolving unlike physical space. Due to the same reason, what shape the crimes might take place is still not fully foreseen; cyber bullying is one such crime. It can take place in many forms and can be tried under different provisions of existing laws but doing so will affect evolution of cyber laws in India. There is a need for defining separate laws for the purpose of cyber-crime offences since the mode, consequences, gravity and probable targets are different. Cyber bullying is one of the offences

which can take an ugly shape in the future and needs to be addressed soon. In making of the cyber bullying law, law makers should take opinion of the psychiatrist since such offence affects the psyche of a child very much. The law should be made considering the psychology of people involved and the legal expertise of law enforcements. If law is not made, many cyber bullies will be left open and victims will have to suffer the consequences and defeating the concept of justice.

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