

Cyberbullying from University Students Perspective: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is a problem that has growing locally as a result of the internet's accessibility and advanced technology such as smartphones, iPads, and laptops. The purpose of this research is to look at University students' experiences with cyberbullying and preventive measures, if any, among a group of undergraduate students. In Pakistan, there is a lack of qualitative studies on the views and experiences of cyberbullying among Pakistanis youth. Having no previous knowledge of their experiences with cyberbullying, in-depth interviews were conducted through a convenient sampling technique from undergraduate university students of social sciences (aged 21-23) in several departments at Kohat University of Science and Technology in KP, Pakistan. A total of 48 respondents were interviewed. According to the findings, cyberbullying has a serious impact on students' psyches, resulting in mental disturbance, weak educational performance, and interpersonal gaps. Research results discovered that there is an extensive gender gap, with girls being more likely than boys to be sufferers of cyberbullying and to be impacted by it. This research explores the reasons for Cyberbullying as well which include fun, prejudice, envy, and vengeance who breached university or societal rules/norms, such as by deceiving others or being promiscuous, were among these causes. The research suggests that parents, educational institutions, and governments pay attention to providing a secure virtual environment for students.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Pakistan context, Social network sites, Qualitative research

Introduction and Background

Bullying is described as intentional, forceful, goal-oriented behavior that creates problems for one party who cannot protect themselves (Rigby, 2002;

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Ringrose, 2008; Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). Traditionally, bullying has taken verbal, physical, and relational forms (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Nylund et al., 2007), however, in recent years, cyberbullying has been labeled as well in which the brutality is carried out via electric or information and communication technology devices ((Slonje& Smith, 2008; Cassidy, Jackson, &Brown, 2009; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2009; Wang, Iannotti, &Nansel, 2009; Fredstrom, Adams, & Gilman,2011). Cyberbullying may take severalshapes, containing transferring SMS through the internet or mobile, creatinginsultingremarks on social media, posting indecent images, or intimidating someone.

In recent years, with enormous growth in information and communication technologies (ICTs)such as social networking services (SNSs), the internet, and smartphones have grown in popularity, a new kind of bullying known as cyberbullying has arisen. Traditional bullying has been linked to a variety of negative health outcomes in victims, including psychosomatic issues, anxiety, and despair, as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Kaltiala-Heino, 2000; Kim, 2008; Gini, 2009). Cyberbullying is commonly associated with anonymity and public exposure (Patchin, 2006; Slonje, 2008; Sticca, 2013), and it has the potential to have much more harmful effects than conventional bullying. According to previous research, targets of cyberbullying were severely upset and had a greater likelihood of suicide ideation (Wang, 2011; Schneider, 2012; Van, 2014).

With the arrival of mobile phones, the internet, and computers, the scourge of cyberbullying has spread. Young people are more prone to use and be abused by these technologies. The term "digital generation" is often used to designate young people (Buckingham, 2013). Tapscott (1998) stated that technology is the cause of a shift in thinking in his concept of the digital generation. Buckingham (2013), on the other hand, opposes technology-based prejudice and states that social media platforms are an instrument for spreading face-to-face contact via actions such as flirting, gossiping, quarreling, showing off, and so on. However, according to Papacharissi (2016), internet technologies are a cause of blurring the boundaries between public and private life. Because "young people have always been sensitive to friendships, and self-presentation, have always been formed, shown, and broken," self-confidence may be challenged by internet streaming and distributed to audiences as a source of entertainment (Livingstone, 2008). Offline peer stakes, on average, provide both losing and winning. Therefore it's quite feasible that peer engagement will ultimately develop into online bullying, which typically arises offline. The advent of computer technology brought daily life interactions closer, sometimes revealing relational hostility (Weinstein & Selman, 2016).

Numerous research studies on cyberbullying have been performed in the West [Slonje, 2008; Sticca, 2013, Schneider, O'Donnell, and Stueve, 2012] by utilizing both types of quantitative and qualitative methods, but research studies on cyberbullying in South Asian countries have been rare (Y-y, Chou, 2008; Zhou et al., 2015; Lee, 2017; Chang, 2013). Moreover, previous research on cyberbullying in the Pakistan context have mostly used quantitative method for analyzing the occurrence and associated variables, while the experiences and views of teenagers in the Pakistan context have received less consideration.

The issue of cyberbullying is affected by the socio cultural environment and is context-dependent (Y-y, & Chou, 2008). According to some research, societal aspects should be addressed when comparing the cyberbullying problem in Western and Asian countries. Shapka and Law (2013) discovered that cultural disparities between European and South Asian teenagers were linked to cyberbullying participation. Li (2008) discovered distinct forms in Chinese and Canadian students' cyberbullying experiences, indicating that access to multiple ICTs might enhance the chance to involve in cyberbullying. Short longitudinal research also found social dissimilarities related to cyberbullying between American and Japanese students (Barlett et al, 2014).

A qualitative method is a useful way to dig further into teenage cyberbullying experiences in the Asian social environment. The experiences and views of cyberbullying among Pakistanis university students were investigated by using a qualitative method.

Criminological Theories and Cyber Crime

Existing criminological theories have been utilized in several research studies on cybercrime to explain participation in cybercrime. The Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) and the Broad Theory of Crime are two examples of general theories of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In addition, criminologists have recently started debating whether current criminological theories can be utilized to explain cybercrime (Grabosky, 2001; Yar, 2005; Jaishankar, 2008; Holt, 2013; Yar, 2012). Three points of view are presented in this debate:

Firstly, Grabosky (2001) takes the first viewpoint, claiming that cybercrime is essentially an old crime perpetrated using modern technology. Existing ideas, according to Grabosky, may therefore be utilized to explain cybercrime. He particularly mentions Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory.

Secondly, in the discussion, Yar (2005) represents the second viewpoint. The Routine Activity Theory is also the beginning point for Yar's investigation.

Certain ideas from the Routine Activity Theory, according to Yar, may be applied to cybercrime. The idea of a motivated perpetrator offline is similar to the concept of a motivated perpetrator online, for example.

Jaishankar takes the third and last position in the discussion (2008, 2011). Jaishankar (2008) favors the creation of new criminological theories especially for the explanation of cybercrime, arguing that current theories are inadequate. Jaishankar (2008) created the Space Transition Theory for this reason, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the online and offline worlds by stating that people continuously 'move' from the offline to the online world and back. Criminal behavior will pass from one universe to the next, according to one of the basic concepts of Space Transition Theory.

Methodology

Research Design, Participants, and Setting

This research is qualitative and it took place between October and February 2021 in Kohat, Pakistan, by using a convenient sampling technique of university students between the age group of 21–23 from four different departments of social sciences on the campus. Because earlier research [Slonje, 2008; Mishna et al, 2009] has shown that identifying victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying is challenging. Participants of the study were enlisted without their previous understanding of cyberbullying familiarities as perpetrators or victims.

To assist and attract student volunteers, teachers advertised the interview opportunity in class. The instructors avoided using the term "bullying" in the statement because of the delicate nature of the subject of cyberbullying. They simply said that the researchers desired to speak with pupils about their online practices. Prospective participant volunteers then contacted their instructors confidentially to get additional information related to the interview (specifically, the interview will cover their views, experiences, and perceptions on cyber bullying) before deciding whether to participate or not. The investigators scheduled an interview with the pupils after the consent of the participant and their legal guardians. Participants in this research were asked to participate voluntarily. The aim of the research, its absolute secrecy, a volunteer-type of student involvement, and participants' ability to not participate in the interview at any moment, were all explained to all participants and their guardians. Before the interviews, the guardians and participants signed a form of written informed consent. When a participant wanted mental health counseling, and psychotherapy, the investigator offered it throughout the interview. In addition, if a participant suffers from psychological distress or had serious suicidal thoughts, were referred

to a psychiatrist, social worker, mental health counselor, or clinical psychologist. As a gesture of our gratitude for their time, we gave the students stationery and refreshments.

Data Collection Procedure

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. The same researcher (first author) performed all interviews in classrooms, lasting 25 to 60 minutes. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, most of the interviews were done in a separate room in each classroom and some interviews were conducted in the office as well. Pre-interview questionnaires included questions on gender, age, internet, and ICT-related variables (internet use time, and how they access the internet). All the interviews were focused on students' perspectives on cyber bullying. Table I summarizes interview(s) themes and objects.

Table I: Items of the interview to explore cyber bullying-related perceptions and experiences

Questions Contents	Topic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know about cyber bullying? • Can you define cyber bullying? 	Understanding cyber bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you ever see cyber bullying in university? • Who was cyber bullied? Who did it to whom? • When and where did it occur? How? • Why did cyber bullying occur? Causes? • What type of behavior do you consider cyber bullying? Why? 	Experience as an observer and spectator of cyber bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been cyber bullied? • Who bullied you? • When, where, and how did you become cyber bullied? • Why do you believe you were cyber bullied? Any reason? • What was your reaction to cyber bullying? 	Experiences as a victim and sufferer of cyber bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been the victim of cyber bullying? • When, where, and how did you experience cyber bullying? 	Experiences as a doer/perpetrator of cyber bullying

• **What do you believe the causes of cyber bullying were?**

We used International software QSR Nvivo10 to transcribe the interviews verbatim. We also utilized thematic analysis and investigator triangulation to familiarise ourselves with the data by understanding the texts, then creating different codes, and organizing each code into bigger category groups (categories, subcategories, and themes) until we reached a saturated thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We tweaked the concepts till we agreed.

Results

A total of 40 students were questioned, including 20 male students (50.0%) and 20 female students (50.0%). The majority of the students (77.5%) were living with their both parents, (and 72.5%) of the participants used a smartphone for accessing the internet (Table II). 28 students (70.0%) acknowledged having been a target of cyberbullying in the past, and most of the sufferers [18.5 of 28 (66.5%)] also reported to being witnesses of cyberbullying. The remaining participants (33.3 percent) said they had seen cyberbullying by classmates, and friends, but none had ever been a perpetrator. Four major themes were discovered, and they are given below with supporting quotations. The quotes were somewhat modified for fluency in certain cases.

Different features of cyberbullying

The participants in the interviews indicated certain characteristics of cyber bullying, such as anonymity, permanency, and visibility, which result in unpleasant emotions such as anger and depression. Most of the participants mentioned that when they were bullied online, they felt helpless. As stated in the following comments, this sentiment was generally because of the reason that the offenders were unknown, preventing the sufferers from taking action of addressing the problem (e.g., by deleting improper material from social media sites). A participant stated;

(F, 13) "You have no way of knowing who the offender is if he or she is anonymous, and you cannot ask him or her to remove the material (humiliating pictures or humiliating films)."

(F, 12) "Things worsened, and several people thought about what an individual said to me on the internet. I didn't feel like I could defend myself, and no matter what I said, no one believed me."

There are numerous popular anonymous social networking sites and software that can be used by students. According to this research. Perpetrators may assault victims without disclosing their names on this site. Furthermore, the public character of cyberbullying was often noted by half of the participants, causing the exposure of the sufferers and simple involvement of other cyber spectators. One of the participants described;

(F, 16) "Your offender sometimes will identify you from your department name or friends list. They will tag you [on Facebook] if they [the offenders] explicitly write your name. Then they'd all verbally attack you at the same time."

A few participants were also concerned that once the material was uploaded online, it would stay there indefinitely. As indicated by the participants;

(F, 19) "On our unofficial university Facebook page, one of my classmates wanted to delete something she had written university Facebook page, but the administrator refused to delete the post."

Table 2 Participants, Demographic Characteristics

	Male Students (N=20)	%	Female Students (N=20)	%	Total(N=40)	%
Age						
21	8	40.0	9	45.0	17	42.5
22	10	50.0	8	40.0	18	45.0
23	2	10.0	3	15.0	5	12.5
Family situation						
I am living with both parents	16	80.8	15	75.0	31	77.5
Those living with single parent	3	15.4	4	20.0	7	17.5
Living with relatives	1	3.8	1	5.0	2	5.0

The tool used to access the Internet						
Desktop computer	3	15.0	1	5.0	4	10.0
Laptop	4	20.0	3	15.0	6	15.0
Smartphone	13	65.0	16	80.0	29	72.5
Usage time of the internet						
<i>University days (hours/in a day)</i>						
lessthan0.5	2	10.0	1	5.0	3	7.5
0.5to<1	2	10.0	1	5.0	3	7.5
1to<2	5	25.0	4	20.0	9	22.5
2to<3	5	25.0	6	30.0	11	27.5
3to<4	4	20.0	4	20.0	8	20.0
4to<5	1	5.0	3	15.0	4	10.0
5ormore	1	5.0	1	5.0	2	5.0
<i>Holidays(hours/perday)</i>						
lessthan0.5	1	5.0	0	0.0	1	2.5
0.5to<1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
1to<2	4	20.0	1	5.0	5	12.5
2to<3	3	15.0	6	30.0	9	22.5
3to<4	6	30.0	4	20.0	10	25.0
4to<5	3	15.0	3	15.0	6	15.0
5ormore	3	15.0	6	30.0	9	22.5

Various cyberbullying sites

The majority of participants said that SNSs, such as unofficial personal Facebook pages, university Facebook pages, Instagram, and Twitter were the places where they were most likely to encounter or see cyberbullying. They went on to say that cyber bullying was common on unofficial university Facebook groups. These sites are open to the public and were established by students to anonymously share their emotions or concerns about someone or something at school. According to one of the victims;

(M, 14) "I watched them verbally abusing me on non-official university Facebook groups, and many fools (classmates) do not see the reality, so they hit the "Like" key. I was enraged and guess that all of them agreed with the offenders. I cannot do anything about this (annoying expression)."

Online gaming, especially multiplayer or violent games, was mentioned by a few of the participants, mainly males, as the additional virtual setting where they had experienced or perceived cyberbullying. A target believed;

(M, 18) "They orally harassed me because my performance in the classroom was weak. They would constantly assault you if you did not comply with their demands. When I was playing the game, I felt extremely uneasy."

Table No. III: Percentage of participants who mentioned certain cyberbullying themes

Themes	No. of participant(s)	% of participants
Cyberbullying cites		
SNSs	28	70.0
Instant messaging applications	9	22.5
Multiplayer online games	3	7.5
Different features of cyberbullying		
Anonymity	22	55.0
Publicity	13	32.5
Permanency	5	12.5
Different types of cyberbullying		

Name-calling (gossiping)	27	69.5
Posting of images	7	17.5
Exclusion(isolation)	4	10.0
Traditional bullying	2(victims)	5.0
What motivates for cyberbullying		
Forfun	19	47.5
ForPunishment	9	22.5
For revenge	6	15.0
Fordiscrimination	4	10.0
Fromjealousy	2	5.0

The above table shows detail of participants who mentioned certain cyberbullying themes

Different types of cyberbullying

Participants stated that the offenders would eliminate sufferers by establishing a group of online friends that comprised their colleagues excluding the victim to isolate them. According to the participants;

(F, 17) "Well, a female was arrogant, therefore she was hated by our classmates. They formed a Facebook group to criticize her. Except for her, all of our class fellows were added to the group. Even though I didn't want to be, I was a part of that group. In case, if I left that group, this would seem that I am on her side. I am confused about what I should do now".

About name-calling (gossiping), participants stated;

(15, F) "They (the culprits) set up two Instagram profiles. One of them was available to all, and the other was public to only close friends. They utilized a private account to talk, and to make derogatory remarks about other students or classmates."

(17, F) "He spread nasty rumors about one of my friends on his private account on Instagram. One of my class fellows

who tracked his account grabbed a snapshot and sent it to me.”

We observed a connection between conventional and cyberbullying, even though we did not specifically inquire about it. Some of the victims of cyberbullying said they had also been bullied at school. They expressed their sadness at being harassed not just at school but also online. A victim said;

(F, 13) “They (the students) called me bitch while I was going over, and they frequently gossiped about me. Nobody takes my side, therefore I couldn't do anything [sad expression]. They would assault me much more violently if I fought back... Someone openly attacked me (on a popular social media platform among Pakistanis university students) by gossiping that I have unethical relations with somebody. He also used abusive language for me.”

What motivates cyberbullying

Several reasons were pointed out as motivations by participants responsible for cyberbullying such as jealousy, discrimination, punishment, Fun, and vengeance for cyberbullying by the participants.

The most frequent motivation for cyberbullying, according to almost half of the participants, was "for amusement or fun. One participant said

(M, 12) “They thought it was amusing to publish his (a student with psychological problems) footage on the Facebook group page”.

Some participants said that many other classmates (or class fellows) are irritated. After all, the sufferers might have done something improper at university, such as being sexually promiscuous, or cheating, because the sufferers were impolite, resulting in the victims being bullied.

According to the participants;

(M, 14) “Because she was hooking up with a lot of men at our university and her actual identity was publicized publicly on our private university Facebook group page, a lady was constantly attacked.”

(M, 11) “On our informal university Facebook group page, I saw that a classmate's identity had been posted and that he had been verbally attacked. We were classmates in the 4th Semester, so I knew him. He's rude and bai-mu. Many people, including myself, despise him.”

A few participants cited revenge as a motivation for cyberbullying. One of the participants, for example, recounted a cyberbullying event that happened in his classroom. A target of conventional bullying couldn't take his offender's continuous mocking of her in the classroom any longer, so he got vengeance on him online. According to a participant;

(F, 15) "The kid found it extremely amusing to taunt him (the victim)." Initially, I thought it was amusing as well. He, on the other hand, made fun of him in practically every lesson. On our unofficial school Facebook page, XYZ (the victim's name) was found to have anonymously verbally attacked the kid who was constantly making fun of him."

Several participants stated that some of the offenders were resentful of the victims' achievements or intellectual achievements, as one participant put it;

(F, 17) "He was not only a member of the national team, but he also excelled in the classroom. Some of his classmates thought he was arrogant. As a result, they launched a campaign against him on our informal university Facebook group page".

Discussion and Analysis

This research study is the first qualitative research on cyberbullying among Pakistanis university students that we are aware of. The majority of prior research [Y-y, 2010; Chang et al, 2013; Chang et al, 2015) used a quantitative approach. Since the quantitative research studies may not completely reflect the extent and gravity of the issue owing to the complexity and sensitivity of cyberbullying. We discovered some parallels and differences between Pakistanis and Western settings based on the findings. In terms of cyberbullying sites, comparable to Western cultures (Dredge et al, 2014; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015), cyberbullying is mostly conducted via social networking sites (SNSs). Anyhow, this research found that pupils often discussed cyberbullying they had knowledge about or seen on their private university Facebook group pages, something that has been seldom documented in previous research studies. Numerous university students in Pakistan have set up private university Facebook accounts to voice their emotions and concerns about something or someone at university. The confidentiality and visibility (Sticca & Perren, 2013, Dredge et al, 2016) of such sites were used to hide humiliation, insults, assaults or personal attacks, enabling a large number of cyber spectators to abuse victims at the same time. Cyberbullying's anonymity and notoriety, as well as its permanence, have significant negative repercussions that might have long-term emotional impacts on sufferers.

In the Western setting, similar findings were reported related to varieties of cyberbullying i.e. Publishing pictures, name-calling (gossiping), and similarity with conventional bullying (Smith, 2008, Sourander, 2010; Price, 2010; Juvonen, 2008; Kowalski, 2012). We discovered that students utilized social media sites (such as Instagram) to chat or call the names of other people, indicating that they might hear about abusive gossiping via Instagram as sufferers or spectators. Future research on this topic is needed to determine if these students are keenly engaging in cyberbullying.

In similar to the previous research by Fun (Raskauskas, 2007), prejudice (Hoff et al, 2009) envy (Verjas et al., 2010), and retaliation (Raskauskas, 2007; Hoff et al, 2009; Verjas et al., 2010; König, 2010) were all shown to be reasons for cyberbullying in earlier research in Western cultures. Furthermore, we discovered that cyberbullying peers who violate university regulations, such as social norms, or cheating, such as conventional hetero-sexual roles (Navarro, 2016) in South Asian cultures may be highly motivated by punishment.

In this research, we discovered that cyberbullying in South Asian nations in general, and in Pakistan, in particular, is unclear or extremely context-dependent. In previous Western research (Vandebosch, 2008; Menesini, 2012), "intention" was highlighted as a key criterion for distinguishing cyberbullying from cyber-jokes. However, many students could not understand the difference between cyberbullying and traditional pranks and jokes among associates, according to our research. The proximity to or nature of the connection with the offender was used to make decisions about whether a specific act or behavior might be deemed cyberbullying. As a result, most offensive behaviors would be viewed as a joke or "just for fun" if perpetrated by a close relative since participants believed that such behavior was not done with the purpose to harm someone.

Conclusions

Cyberbullying seems to be widespread among undergraduate university students, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways (e.g., name-calling, publishing pictures, prohibition from online Facebook groups, etc.) and on a variety of stages (instant messaging applications and Facebook). Given the nature of cyberbullying and Pakistan's socio cultural features, our results highlight the urgent necessity for the Pakistanis education structure by taking action to prevent and eliminate cyberbullying, containing improving teachers' and students' abilities and suitable reply methods. Bullying on social media has an emotional, intellectual, and social impact on its victims. Theft of photos, threats, gossip, unpleasant comments, and sexual harassment are among the problems that users of social networking sites face. Gender is also a significant component in this study, as it was shown that

males were more likely to be involved in bullying, while girls were less likely to be involved in bullying. Females were more affected emotionally and academically by cyberbullying than males. Bullying has negative effects on social relationships and results in people becoming isolated, according to the research

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