

Research Article

Impact of Cyberbullying on Mental Health of Women: A Study of University Students in Dhaka City

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a part of cyber-crime which is committed with the use of digital devices and social media all over the world; however, in developing and poor countries its prevalence is higher. As a developing country Bangladesh is on the way to massive technological advances and at the same time internet, computer and mobile phone based crimes are also increasing. Like other cyber-related crimes, cyberbullying is also increasing gradually in Bangladesh. Most of the victims of this disturbing as well as humiliating crime are young women. The nature of this type of crime is diverse and highly irritating for the victims. Cyberbullying has already become a global concern and is taken seriously in developed countries while in Bangladesh it needs more attention. However, cyberbullying has a serious negative impact on mental health and it needs to be controlled as early as possible considering the consequence and sensitivity of the crime. This study explores the actual status of Cyberbullying in Dhaka city and the mental health consequences of the university-going female students after being cyberbullied.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Internet, Digital devices, Social media, Young women, Mental health, Dhaka city

INTRODUCTION

The internet is a defining factor for making the modern generation in any country in this modern age. As a part of the “Digital Bangladesh” program, with the advantage of

affordable smartphone and data packages, the usage of the internet is huge in Bangladesh. About 60.7% of people use the internet on a daily basis in Bangladesh now (Internet World Stats, 2021). Despite all the good that the internet has brought, there are always some people with a negative mentality who use it with malicious intent (Lumen, 2021). Internet usage rate is higher among the young generation which is mostly used in social media. Young people are presently using a diverse and advanced run of social media systems to connect and communicate with their peers (Young Minds, 2018). As young people are constantly sharing their personal information and thoughts on social media, their safety in using social media is a growing concern. A negative usage of the internet, Cyberbullying is a personal attack that takes place over digital devices like mobile phones, computers, and tablets. It occurs through SMS, text through online social media, or any app where people can view and share contents by posting mean comments, leaking sensitive information, blackmailing, or somehow degrading someone's image (Lumen, 2021). Cyberbullying has become a disturbing trend in recent times, particularly against women, as victims and accused in numerous sensational occurrences are routinely abused by a section of netizens (Rabbi, 2020; Stop Bullying, 2021). In Bangladesh, cyberbullying is a punishable offense under the ICT Act 2006. Despite this law, this mentally disturbing crime is not under control. Now it is essential to understand the reasons and effects of this poisonous crime to decrease this malpractice and the strategies to prevent them. Cyberbullying is a worldwide open health concern with colossal negative impacts (Khine *et al.*, 2020). It is not only a matter of mental distress but also hampers the regular lives and well-being of people, especially young people as they use the internet and social media most. It disturbs them both emotionally and socially from reaching their full human capacity. Therefore, this study aims to identify the actual situation of cyberbullying and the effect on the victims afterward while generating awareness among everyone.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our present world is highly dependent on the use of digital gadgets like mobile phones, computers, internet, etc. With the appearance of innovation, the use of the internet is increasing rapidly. In this digital era, we cannot think of a single day without different social networking sites like Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and many more. Most cases of cyberbullying in Bangladesh happen by using the popular media of social networking sites (Monni and Sultana, 2016). With the invention of social media platforms, it was intended to light up healthy debate and connecting easily. But it brought negativity along with its flexibility. People started saying horrible things to others by using the anonymity of forums (Firstpost, 2021). People, especially women, are mercilessly criticized for their views and personal information. It has become a

much common occurrence with adverse effects to the victims. It is an unwanted problem that can happen anytime and causes troubles in the regular lives of young women. These kinds of negative incidents make victims shaken, self-doubted, and under-confident. These negative events disturb them and destroy their human capacity to be fully occupied in something constructive.

Cyberbullying was first used in 1998. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “cyberbullying is the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person (such as a student) often done anonymously.” But as time has gone on and the internet itself has progressed, so has the definition of cyberbullying (Maryville University, 2021). In recent years, cyberbullying has somehow become a new type of violence (Turan *et al.*, 2011). Although bullying is not a new phenomenon, the digital landscape has fundamentally changed the way that young people are experiencing it (Law *et al.*, 2012). Cyberbullying is defined as a forceful and intentional act that is carried out utilizing electronic forms of contact by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot effortlessly protect him or herself (Smith, *et al.*, 2008). However, in cyberbullying, the perpetrators can stay anonymous allowing the greater potential to do or say more harmful things to the victims than they would in personal relations (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). It has become a recent trend, especially against women. Cyberbullying is an ancient issue within Bangladesh. It is moved with old-style bullying since innovation offers anonymity. A few days back young females were victimized face to face on the road, or in colleges, or any place but nowadays these shapes of bullying are replaced by the utilization of computers or mobiles (Monni and Sultana, 2016). Victims are routinely abused on online platforms for their gender, attire, posture, lifestyle, etc. They are being attacked with various obscene comments, threatening text messages by dragging their personal life (New Age, September 11, 2020). Cyberbullying includes sending or posting negative, harmful, or false content about someone. It includes sharing private information about someone causing humiliation. Young men are more likely to do this crime whether they are known or unknown to the victims. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful and criminal behavior. It has become easier to access someone’s social media accounts and defame them. Young females are generally unaware of the legal procedures or feel uneasy to take action. Very few of them dare to report the crime and to deal with the long procedures.

Cyberbullying attacks are done at any time of the day or night with the defenseless situation of the victim. Home is no longer a shelter from negative peer pressure such as bullying. The victim of cyberbullying is beneath the hazard of emotional, physiological, and social troubles which may keep her partitioned from the family, friends, and society and planning to commit significant harms by herself (Gleeson, 2014). Being focused on

by a cyberbully causes various mental wellbeing issues which leads to physical sickness as well. Cyberbullying is associated with considerable negative mental and psychosocial consequences in children and young people, making it a serious public health concern (Kwan *et al.*, 2021). It has numerous adverse effects on the victims to fully reach their human capacity. In a study, victims show more negative emotions and stress than non-victims (Mallik and Radwan, 2020). Students who suffered cyberbullying victimization faced academic difficulties (Khine *et al.*, 2020). According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, cyberbullying exacerbated symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Firstpost, 2021). Other studies also found that women are more bullied than men. Eventually, the low self-confidence and worthless feeling of the victims lead them to poor academic performance as well as their disturbing social life atmosphere. Victims of cyberbullying often succumb to anxiety, depression, and other stress-related conditions (Vaillancourt *et al.*, 2017). It adversely affects the academic, social, and emotional development of young people (Peled, 2019). The common mental effects of cyberbullying are depression & anxiety, low self-esteem, self-harm, academic issues, and suicidal thoughts. Young women sometimes even have to go through long-term psychological help too so that they can recover from these. And most of them do not even understand or have the courage to receive psychological help.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Following qualitative methodology has been followed in this research to achieve the aims and goals of the study.

Sources of Data

Information has been gathered from both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected by direct interviews with the female university students in Dhaka city. For this study, a questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions in such a way so that participants can easily describe their experiences properly. Secondary data have been collected mainly from journals, articles, newspapers, the internet, etc.

Sampling

In this study, the participants have been selected by using the purposive sampling method. In purposive sampling, the researcher purposely chooses subjects who, in their opinion, are thought to be relevant to the research topic (Sarantakos, 1998). It was not possible to incorporate all the female university students in Dhaka city who were relevant for the study. Interviews were conducted on female students of some selected universities. The selected educational institutions of Dhaka city were 2 public universities, 2 private

universities and 2 colleges under national university. Samples of 72 female students were sub-sectioned as 12 from each of the 6 universities were interviewed for this study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study has been done on female students aging from 18 to 26 across Dhaka city. Among the respondents, 83.3% were at the graduation level and 16.7% were at the post-graduation level. During fieldwork, open-ended questions were used to know about the experiences of the respondents regarding cyberbullying. Findings of the research are brought out by analyzing the data in various ways. The answers have been categorized and presented in different tables.

Cyberbullying Experience of the Respondents

The study shows in Table 1 that the rate of casualty of cyberbullying was positive almost 77.78% and negative approximately 22.22%. 77.78% may be an enormous proportion which was a bit stunning at to begin with. This explains why this is such a serious and important topic to be worked on.

Table 1: The rate of becoming a victim of cyberbullying

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	56	77.78%
No	16	22.22%
Total	72	100%

Source: Primary Data

Although it was a delicate issue to talk about, it was seen within the fieldwork that all respondents took this matter enthusiastically and answered genuinely. They were concerned about it and wanted this to stop at any cost.

In this modern world, the medium of crime has become versatile too. Predators do their crimes more smartly and ruthlessly. Like other modern crimes, cyberbullying happens in different ways too. One of the foremost desiring targets of cyberbullies is to degrade the victim's social situation and with the premise of a target, the bullies intent themselves to do anything harmful to degrade the victim's social basis (Gleeson, 2014). That's why, various types of cyber bullying experience are shown in Table 2. Reacting to the address of what sorts of cyberbullying they experienced; the respondents answered such as: humiliating comments about 34.91%, threatening texts in inbox is 28.30%, false rumors are 15.09%, and blackmailing is 9.43%. Here, it is found that the foremost common sorts of cyberbullying are: humiliating comments and threatening texts. So, it is quite evident that bullies want to upset victims emotionally and humiliate them socially.

Table 2: Experience of various types of bullying

Last 12 Months → Type of Bullying↓	More than 5 times	2-4 times	Once	Never	Total
Humiliating comments in your social posts	4 (3.77%)	9 (8.49%)	14 (13.21%)	10 (9.43%)	37 (34.91%)
False rumors	1 (0.94%)	3 (2.83%)	8 (7.55%)	4 (3.77%)	16 (15.09%)
Threatening texts in their inbox	4 (3.77%)	5 (4.72%)	13 (12.26%)	8 (7.55%)	30 (28.30%)
Blackmailed by edited embarrassing pictures	3 (2.83%)	1 (0.94%)	2 (1.89%)	4 (3.77%)	10 (9.43%)
Others	0 (0%)	1 (0.94%)	5 (4.72%)	7 (6.60%)	13 (12.26%)
Total	12 (11.32%)	19 (17.92%)	42 (39.62%)	33 (31.13%)	106 (100%)

Source: Primary Data (Multiple answers were taken)

And in the response to the question during the last 12 months, it is found that almost 39.62% of respondents were at least being cyberbullied once and 11.32% faced this more than 5 times. So, it can be said that young women face cyberbullying every now and then which is not the desired result that could have been hoped for.

Table 3 presents the types of bully and the age of the predators who want to bully young women. As in this modern world, the nature of criminals has become unpredictable too. In response to the question of the nature of the bully, respondents mentioned unknown persons which are about 41.67%, personal enemies about 20.83%, someone they just know about 20.83% and others about 16.67%. It is found in this study that unknown persons are more prone to doing this crime.

And in reaction to the age of bullies, the greatest bullies were from 21-40 for almost 63.89% and teenagers approximately 26.39%. So, it can be said that young males are more prone to bully young females which raises the issue of society's ethical values. If it is collaborated together, it can be said that unknown young men from teenagers to the age of 40 have a high propensity to bully young women.

Table 3: Age of the wrongdoing persons and types of bully

Age of the bully → Type of bully ↓	Teenager	21-40	41 and Above	Total
Unknown person	9 (12.5%)	18 (25%)	3 (4.17%)	30 (41.67%)
Personal or social enemy	4 (5.56%)	11 (15.28%)	0 (0%)	15 (20.83%)
Someone they just know of	4 (5.56%)	11 (15.28%)	0 (0%)	15 (20.83%)
Others	2 (2.78%)	6 (8.33%)	4 (5.56%)	12 (16.67%)
Total	19 (26.39%)	46 (63.89%)	7 (9.72%)	72 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Mental Condition after Being Cyber Bullied

Health is an important factor for any human being to reach his/her complete capacity. Mental health is very important nowadays. It is considered equally important as physical health. World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of physical, mental, and social and otherworldly well-being and not only the non-attendance of disease or infirmity” (Who.int., 2021). Cyberbullying is not an easy experience for the victim. It completely changes the victim’s perception of herself. A victim feels worthless, faulty, and unhappy about her existence. Various kinds of mental health problems start to grow in her mind.

Table 4: Mental condition after being cyber bullied

Mental condition	Frequency	Percentage
Low self-confidence	25	24.27%
Fear and trauma	21	20.39%
Aggressive behavior	20	19.42%
Depression	26	25.24%
None	11	10.68%
Total	103	100%

Source: Primary Data (Multiple answers were taken)

One of the most dangerous impacts of cyberbullying is that the victims are to carry out a genuine mental hazard (Monni and Sultana, 2016). As it is shown in Table 4, after being bullied many of the young females got depressed and the percentage is also high which is 25.24%, low self-confidence about 24.27%, aggressive behavior 19.42% and trauma about 20.39%. All these impacts are serious, sensitive, and difficult to overcome. Here, it is found that depression and low self-confidence are the common impacts that remain with the victims for a long time, hampering their daily lives. Which results in their poor academic performance, disturbing social life, insecurity, and many other consequences. Enduring from mental agony may restrain the victim’s capacity to socialism and cover the victim of her own internal arena keeping distant themselves from family, companions and society (Monni and Sultana, 2016). Cyberbullying has an extremely devastating impact on the socio-psychological circle of the victims that can lead them to extreme depression, obsession, anxiety and social and mental phobia. It can ultimately push them to commit suicide (Schenk and Fremouw, 2012).

Victims’ Reaction after Being Cyber Bullied

Individuals respond to various incidents in their life differently. Cyberbullying is not a simple incident to deal with. It is found that respondents almost 52.78% take action against it and 47.22% do not. The ratio of not taking action is quite high which is very

unfortunate. Studies found that fewer actions of the victims encourage the criminals to act more carefree.

In Table 5, it is seen that 38 respondents responded that they took action, out of these 38, all of them asked for help from others, bravely confronted bullies about 60.53%, and some of them asked for professional help (28.59%). It needs to be appreciated that they seek help from their surroundings and confront the bully on their own at a high rate. It is a very hopeful situation against this disturbing crime. And in response to those who do not take action because they feel uneasy to talk about it at 129.41% rate and are scared by the bully about 50% out of 34 respondents. It could be said they become very disturbed and suffocated regarding this topic that they cannot even take action against it.

Table 5: Action of the victims

Whether they took action		Type of the action	Frequency
YES	38 (52.78%)	Confront them	23 (60.53%)
		Ask help from surrounding people	38 (100%)
		Ask for professional help	11 (28.95%)
NO	34 (47.22%)	Felt uneasy to talk about	44 (129.41%)
		Little faith in existing law	11 (32.35%)
		Scared by the bully	17 (50%)

Source: Primary Data (Multiple answers were taken regarding types of action)

As life is uncertain, anything can happen suddenly. And cyberbullying is an unexpected negative occurrence for which likely anybody is not prepared for. Among these respondents, some young females could not handle their mental condition in response to their negative experiences. Presenting Table 6, fortunately this proportion of who needed psychological help is smaller (11.11%). Among 8 respondents, 50% suffered for a few weeks, 12.5% for 1-2 months, 12.5% for more than 6 months and 25% are still trying to recover. The hopeful matter of this study is that 88.89% were somehow able to fight on their own.

Table 6: Psychological help

Psychiatrist's Help Needed		Time needed to be recovered	Frequency
YES	8 (11.11%)	Up to 2 weeks	4 (50%)
		1-2 months	1 (12.5%)
		More than 6 months	1 (12.5%)
		Still suffering	2 (25%)
NO	64 (88.89%)	N/A	

Source: Primary Data (Multiple answers were taken regarding duration of suffering)

In Table 7, in response to the question of if anyone else shared their experience with these respondents; they replied positively about 72.22% and negatively about 27.77%. It is a matter of great hope that young women are discussing their unfortunate events with each other which will result in awareness for others and for them they will get someone to care about.

Table 7: Sharing of experience

Whether anyone shared their experience	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	52	72.22%
No	20	27.78%
Total	72	100%

Source: Primary Data

A Brief Analysis

This research shows that an alarming rate of women faces cyberbullying every now then in their regular lives. They are being bullied by mostly unknown young men. These young women are being bullied in various ways. The most common forms of being bullied are: humiliating comments and threatening texts, which disturbs them both personally and socially. As is visible in the findings of the study, they deal with cyberbullying-related mental health consequences mostly on their own. They even suffer from serious mental health problems such as depression, low self-confidence, aggressive behaviors, fear, and trauma, etc. because of cyberbullying. Few of them needed professional psychological help too. The taking action rate of the victims is not satisfactory. They seek help only from surroundings, not from professionals. Luckily, they have a good tendency to share their experience with others. It is a hopeful sign to raise awareness among young women to deal with this unfortunate event of their lives. Finally, it can be said, they have to go through a lot because of cyberbullying which needs to be stopped as fast as possible. Since these young women will be leading our future era and they got to be grown properly without any kind of obstacles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cyberbullying is an unexpected event with an immense negative impact. It is an online-based problem that has now become a social problem as well (Medical Bag, 2021). In Bangladesh, the situation of the problem is quite serious. An alarming rate of young women constantly faces this problem. Still, it is an underrated issue in Bangladesh that requires more attention. Cyberbullying has become a real concern for young women. They are being constantly bullied in various ways by different kinds of bullies. These young females do not even take action against it at a very high rate. The impact of this problem is quite devastating too. Sometimes they even had to go through serious mental

distress like depression, low self-confidence, fear, etc. These kinds of mental troubles do not let them utilize their human capacity fully. However, this problem cannot be ignored any longer. As computer and innovation is the fabricator of cyberbullying, it is believed that by computer and innovation this issue can be relieved (Monni and Sultana, 2016). The technological industries have been criticized for not showing the leadership required to innovate and address growing concerns about the scale of online bullying on their platforms (Goodman, 2021). Technological advances should be used by pointing out this as a social problem. There could be a new approach of technological advancement where many apps may set limitations, will send alerts when alarming keywords are used and can receive reports with easy access to a 24-hour support system (Medical Bag, 2021). The rate of cyberbullying could not be mitigated until the victims open up and report about the crime. Government can play a pivotal role to prevent this crime. It should be publicly promoting laws, raising awareness to make a friendly environment, broadcasting prevention strategies as public propaganda. A quick and increasing punishment should be formed regarding this issue. Every type of institution should have some restricted sites so that victims can report cyberbullying anonymously. Young women are a big part of the nation, the government has a big role to be sensitive about it so they can live healthily and make a proper contribution to the country.

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