
CYBERBULLYING: THE SILENT EPIDEMIC OF THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a very detrimental phenomenon that affects the mental health of adolescents and has become a major problem in the digital age. In recent years, cyberbullying cases have increased significantly, with victims not only limited to teenagers but also adults. This research aims to discuss cyberbullying, its impact on mental health, and the efforts that can be made to prevent and treat this problem. This study uses a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively understand the form, prevalence, and impact of cyberbullying. Quantitative data was collected through a survey targeting 2,000 participants from various regions. The results of the study show that cyberbullying is a form of harassment carried out through electronic media such as the Internet, mobile devices, and social media platforms. Unlike traditional bullying, which is limited by space and time, cyberbullying can happen anytime and anywhere, reaching a wider audience. Cyberbullying involves the use of digital technology to intentionally and repeatedly intimidate, humiliate, or harm another individual. Typical forms of cyberbullying include harassment, insults, dissemination of indecent photos or messages, personalization, exclusion, and cyber persecution. This research has implications that cyberbullying is a serious problem that requires immediate attention and action from all levels of society. Collaboration between educators, parents, policymakers, and tech companies is essential to address these issues and support victims.

Keyword: Cyberbullying, Epidemic, Digital Age.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has transformed how humans interact and communicate. The Internet and social media have now become integral parts of daily life, offering various benefits such as easy access to information, faster communication, and opportunities to build extensive social networks. However, behind all these benefits lies a dark side that must be addressed: cyber bullying (Surya et al., 2023).

Cyberbullying, or online harassment, is a form of abuse carried out through electronic media (Firmansyah, 2023). Unlike traditional bullying, which usually occurs in schools or workplaces, cyberbullying can happen anytime and anywhere, making it a complex problem to tackle. Victims of cyberbullying often cannot escape their perpetrators, as the harassment can continue incessantly across various digital platforms (Arifin et al., 2023).

Cyberbullying can be defined as bullying behavior conducted through digital media, such as social media, email, or chat rooms (Anisah et al., 2024). The most common types of cyberbullying include insults, uploading photos, or sending indecent messages (Adnan et al., 2024). Cyberbullying can be perpetrated by unknown individuals, friends, or even acquaintances of the victim.

The impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of victims is significant. Some of the most common effects include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts (Freska & Kep,

2023). Victims of cyberbullying may also experience sleep disturbances, fatigue, and difficulties in interacting with others (Febrianti et al., 2024). These effects can persist into the future, affecting the quality of life of the victims and the surrounding community (Saksono, 2023).

The purpose of this research is to analyze and evaluate positive legal regulations related to sexual harassment crimes in Indonesia. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of existing laws in handling sexual harassment cases and identify shortcomings or gaps in regulations that need improvement. In addition, the benefit of this study is to provide evidence-based policy recommendations for policymakers, academics, and legal practitioners to improve protection for victims of sexual harassment and ensure better justice in the Indonesian legal system.

METHOD

This research uses a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively understand the forms, prevalence, and impact of cyberbullying. Quantitative data will be collected through surveys targeting 2.000 participants from various regions, including students, parents, and educators, to analyze patterns and correlations in cyberbullying experiences. Complementary qualitative data will be obtained from semi-structured interviews with a subset of respondents and detailed case studies to gain deeper insights into personal experiences and societal responses. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data through thematic and narrative analyses will provide a holistic view of the issue.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cyberbullying is a form of harassment or bullying conducted through electronic media, such as the Internet, mobile devices, and social media platforms (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Unlike traditional bullying, which is limited by space and time, cyberbullying can occur anytime and anywhere, reaching a broader audience. Cyberbullying involves the use of digital technology to intentionally and repeatedly intimidate, embarrass, or harm another individual (Prasetyorini, 2022).

Cyberbullying can manifest in various forms, each with its characteristics and impacts. Here are some of the primary forms of cyberbullying:

- a. Harassment involves sending repeated, harsh, insulting, or threatening messages to the victim. This harassment is often done through text messages, emails, or social media comments. For example, it repeatedly sends derogatory messages or threats via social media platforms.
- b. Denigration is spreading false information or rumors that damage someone's reputation. This can be done through social media posts, blogs, or websites. An example would be making false posts claiming that someone has engaged in embarrassing or illegal activities.
- c. Flaming posts provocative, hateful, and harsh comments in online forums or discussion groups to incite debates and arguments. For instance, posting highly offensive and inflammatory comments in an online discussion forum can lead to significant conflicts.
- d. Impersonation involves someone using another person's identity to send messages or perform actions that harm the victim. This is often done to embarrass or deceive others. An example would be hijacking someone's social media account and sending embarrassing messages to their friends.
- e. Outing and Trickery involve sharing someone's personal, secret, or embarrassing information without permission. Trickery is deceiving someone into revealing personal information

disseminated to the public. For example, upload embarrassing personal photos or videos without the owner's consent or manipulate someone into sharing secrets that are then spread.

- f. Exclusion is the deliberate act of excluding someone from a group or online community to hurt their feelings. It is often done within friendship groups or online communities. For example, it is removing someone from a chat group or social media group intentionally and without apparent reason.
- g. Cyberstalking is a form of harassment involving monitoring, stalking, and sending threatening or intimidating messages to the victim continuously and, for example, Sending repeated threatening messages and monitoring the victim's online activities without consent.

Any form of cyberbullying has the potential to cause significant harm to the victim. The consequences can include emotional stress, anxiety, depression, decreased academic performance, and even the risk of suicide (Charoenwanit, 2019). Additionally, because cyberbullying can spread widely and quickly, the effects are often more severe than traditional bullying. Therefore, society needs to understand the various forms of cyberbullying so that they can identify and take appropriate action to prevent and deal with these cases.

Cyberbullying is a global problem that is increasing along with the development of the use of digital technology (Smith & Steffgen, 2013). Data and research shows that cyberbullying is a common phenomenon in various parts of the world, affecting children, teenagers, and even adults. The following are some findings regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying:

Global Statistics Data

- a. United States: According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2018, approximately 59% of teenagers in the United States reported that they had experienced some form of cyberbullying. The most common form is harassment via social media and text messages. Another study from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2019 found that 15% of high school students in the US reported being victims of cyberbullying in the past 12 months.
- b. Europe: In the UK, a survey from the Anti-Bullying Alliance in 2019 showed that around 24% of children aged 11 to 16 had been victims of cyberbullying. In Germany, a study by EU Kids Online in 2020 found that around 17% of children aged 9 to 16 experienced cyberbullying.
- c. Asia: In India, a survey by Microsoft in 2012 showed that 53% of children admitted to having been victims of cyberbullying. Even though this data is quite old, it illustrates that cyberbullying is a significant problem. In Japan, a study by the National Institution for Youth Education in 2018 revealed that 10% of junior high school students experienced cyberbullying.
- d. Australia: Research by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner in 2020 found that around 44% of Australian teenagers experienced cyberbullying in the form of teasing or insults on social media.

Factors Affecting Prevalence

Increased access to and use of digital technology, including smartphones and social media, has contributed to increasing cases of cyberbullying. Children and teens are spending more time online, which increases their risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying. The internet allows users to communicate anonymously, which can make it easier for perpetrators to engage in cyberbullying without fear of immediate consequences. The anonymity often makes perpetrators feel bolder and less responsible for their actions. Lack of supervision by parents and educators regarding children's online activities is also a factor that influences the prevalence of cyberbullying.

Children who are not adequately supervised are more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying (Andika Jaya et al., 2023).

Culture and social norms in various countries also influence the prevalence of cyberbullying. In some cultures, bullying may not be considered a severe problem, while in others, there is greater awareness of its negative impacts. The high prevalence of cyberbullying has various negative impacts, both for individuals and society:

Emotional and Psychological Impact: Victims of cyberbullying often experience stress, anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem. In some cases, the victim may feel so hopeless that he commits suicide.

- a. **Academic Impact:** Children and adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying often show decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, and a reluctance to participate in school activities.
- b. **Social Impact** Cyberbullying can cause social isolation, where victims withdraw from social interactions due to shame or fear of further harassment. This may affect their ability to build healthy relationships in the future.
- c. **Physical Health Impact:** Chronic stress due to cyberbullying can affect the victim's physical health, causing problems such as sleep disorders, headaches, and eating disorders.

Overcoming cyberbullying requires a comprehensive approach and involves various parties. The following are some prevention and intervention strategies that schools, parents, governments, and technology companies can implement:

- a. **Education Program in School:** Schools should provide curricula that include digital education, safe and ethical internet use, and the negative impacts of cyberbullying. Example Implementation: Hosting workshops and seminars for students on digital security and how to identify and report cyberbullying.
- b. **Teacher and Staff Training:** Teachers and school staff need to be trained to recognize signs of cyberbullying and understand how to address it. Example Implementation: Annual training for teachers and staff on anti-cyberbullying policies and support methods for victims.
- c. **Developing Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programs:** Programs should cover prevention, detection, and intervention. Example Implementation: Establishing an anti-bullying team at school responsible for handling reports and supporting victims.
- d. **Parental Involvement:** Parents should build open communication with their children about online activities and experiences in the digital world. Example Implementation: Regular discussion sessions at home about safe internet usage and signs of cyberbullying.
- e. **Providing Education to Parents:** Parents should be educated about technology and social media and how to monitor their children's online activities without violating privacy. Example Implementation: Hosting school seminars and workshops for parents on cyberbullying prevention and parental control tools.
- f. **Policy and Legislation:** Governments should develop and enforce laws specifically addressing cyberbullying, including protection for victims and sanctions for perpetrators. Example Implementation: Introducing laws regulating cyberbullying reporting and penalties for perpetrators;

- g. School-Wide Anti-Cyberbullying Policies: Schools should have clear anti-cyberbullying policies and procedures for handling cyberbullying incidents. Example Implementation: Creating written policies outlining actions to be taken in case of cyberbullying at school;
- h. Technology Solutions: Technology companies and social media platforms should develop tools to detect and prevent cyberbullying and provide easy-to-use reporting features. Example Implementation: Using AI algorithms to detect harassment-containing content and providing quick reporting buttons for users;
- i. Developing Parental Control Software: Software allowing parents to monitor their children's online activities and restrict access to harmful content should be developed. Example Implementation: Parental control apps enable monitoring and screen time settings and block specific content.
- j. Support Services: Easy access to mental health services and counseling should be provided for cyberbullying victims. Example Implementation: Counseling programs at schools and collaboration with local mental health services;
- k. Forming Support Groups: Support groups should be formed for cyberbullying victims to share experiences and coping strategies. Example Implementation: Group support sessions at schools or communities facilitated by mental health professionals.

Case study

- a. Be Internet Awesome, a program by Google.

This program is designed to teach children about digital safety and ethics. Using interactive games and engaging teaching materials, this program helps children understand the importance of good behavior on the internet and how to protect themselves from cyberbullying (Kusumawati et al., 2023).

- b. Delete Cyberbullying, Initiative in Europe

This campaign aims to raise awareness about cyberbullying through education and advocacy. They provide resources for schools, parents, and children and work to influence policy at national and European levels.

To understand the impact and complexity of cyberbullying, here are some case studies that illustrate how cyberbullying occurs and the consequences it causes:

- c. The Amanda Todd case (Ahmad M. Ramli, 2019)

Amanda Todd is a Canadian teenager who became a victim of cyberbullying after an incident in which her topless photo was shared by a man she met online. The man threatened to distribute the photo if Amanda did not take specific actions as he requested.

Chronology of Events: After Amanda rejected the demands, the photo was distributed to her friends and family, causing Amanda to experience repeated harassment, both online and offline. Amanda changed schools several times in an attempt to escape the harassment. However, the cyberbullying continued to follow and only got worse. He posted a video on YouTube recounting his ordeal through a series of cue cards, which went viral after his death.

Impact and Ending: Amanda Todd experienced severe depression and anxiety due to constant cyberbullying. In October 2012, Amanda ended her life. This case highlighted the destructive impact of cyberbullying. It sparked a global awareness campaign about the dangers of cyberbullying and the need for stricter laws to protect victims (Okadinata et al., 2022).

Reactions and Actions: After her death, the Canadian government introduced new laws covering aspects of cyberbullying and the distribution of images without permission. This case also sparked a global discussion about the importance of digital education, internet safety, and mental health support for victims of cyberbullying.

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying is a severe problem that is increasingly prevalent with the development of digital technology. Not only teenagers but also adults are affected by cyberbullying cases. The impact of cyberbullying is highly detrimental, affecting individuals emotionally, psychologically, academically, socially, and even physically. Victims of cyberbullying may experience depression, low self-esteem, and even have a risk of suicide. There are various forms of cyberbullying, such as harassment, denigration, flaming, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking. Cyberbullying is more challenging to address as it can occur (Lativa & Susilastuti, 2022) anytime and anywhere through various digital platforms. Therefore, prevention and intervention require collaboration from various parties, such as schools, parents, governments, and technology companies. Some strategies discussed to prevent and address cyberbullying include educational programs in schools, parental involvement, policy and legislation development, technology-based solutions such as AI detection, and providing support services for victims. The case studies presented demonstrate the destructive impact of cyberbullying and the need for multidisciplinary efforts to eradicate this problem. Cyberbullying is a silent epidemic that demands attention and immediate action from all layers of society. We can work towards a safer digital environment by understanding its forms, prevalence, and impacts and implementing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Collaboration among educators, parents, policymakers, and technology companies is crucial to addressing this issue and supporting victims. This research emphasizes that addressing cyberbullying is not solely the responsibility of one party but requires collective efforts to create a better and safer digital world for all users (Budianto & Halimuddin, 2023).

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