



## Echoes of the Keyboard: A Deep Dive into Cyber bullying's Emotional Aftermath

Naila Rafique

Assistant Professor Law, Capital University of Science & Technology (CUST), Islamabad, PK

**Dr. Tahir Hameed Ullah Khan (Corresponding Author)**

Professor/Dean Law, Capital University of Science & Technology (CUST), Islamabad, PK

### ABSTRACT

*Cyber bullying is a deliberate and repeated act of aggression, often aimed at individuals perceived to have less social or physical power, with the intent to intimidate, harm, or dominate. While bullying can occur in various settings, its growing prevalence in educational institutions in Pakistan poses significant concerns. In today's digital age, young adults increasingly derive self-worth and social identity through online interactions. This virtual space, with its anonymity, lack of regulation, and broad reach, has become fertile ground for cyber bullying. The study aimed to assess the prevalence of cyber bullying, the coping mechanisms employed by students, and its psychological impact among Pakistan college students in Islamabad. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among undergraduate students. Standardized self-report tools were used to assess experiences of cyber bullying and cyber victimization, coping strategies, self-esteem, and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Among 190 participants, 50% reported being victims of cyber bullying. Common coping strategies included the use of technical measures, seeking support from peers, and directly confronting the bully. The findings highlight the widespread nature and detrimental psychological effects of cyber bullying among Indian medical students. There is an urgent need for awareness programs and institutional policies to support affected students and address this growing mental health challenge.*

**Keywords:** Aggressive, Hostile, Generation, Strategies, Cyber Bullying.

### Introduction

Bullying refers to a deliberate and repeated form of aggressive behavior where an individual or group uses intimidation, threats, or force to exert dominance over others who are perceived to be less powerful socially, emotionally, or physically. While bullying is known to occur in various environments such as families, workplaces, and educational institutions, its emergence in digital spaces presents unique challenges in identifying and addressing such behavior. In the current digital age, young adults often derive their self-worth and social identity from online interactions, particularly through social networking platforms. This dependency on virtual validation has made online spaces particularly conducive to cyber bullying a modern form of harassment carried out through electronic means. The Internet's anonymity, vast reach, and lack of regulation make it easier for bullies to operate without fear of repercussions, allowing harmful behaviors to persist unchecked.

Cyber bullying can take many shapes. It may involve subtle actions like deliberately excluding someone from online communities or giving them the "silent treatment" in-group conversations. More direct forms include spreading false rumors, using derogatory language, trolling, sending threatening messages, or sharing explicit content without the victim's consent. The psychological effects of these behaviors can be severe, with victims often facing emotional distress, anxiety, depression, social isolation, poor academic performance, substance abuse, and in extreme cases, suicidal tendencies. On a global scale, cyber bullying among young people is becoming a serious public health issue. Although there has been increasing awareness, most Indian studies in this field have concentrated on school children, operating under the belief that college students—being older and

more digitally savvy—are better equipped to handle such challenges. However, newer research contradicts this assumption, revealing that cyber bullying often continues, and may even worsen, during college years.

International research suggests that cyber victimization during the college years affects between 10% and 30% of students. This growing concern highlights the urgent need for more research within the Indian college context. Understanding the nature, prevalence, and psychological impact of cyber bullying in higher education is crucial for developing effective support systems and preventive strategies for student well being.

### Literature Review

This meta-analysis highlighted the growing prevalence of cyber bullying among adolescents and young adults, including college students. It found strong associations between cyber victimization and psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The anonymity of online platforms was identified as a key factor contributing to the rise of cyber bullying (Lattanner, M. R. 2014).

This study distinguished between traditional bullying and cyber bullying, showing that cyberbullying is often more difficult to detect and control. Victims reported feeling more helpless due to the persistent and invasive nature of online attacks, highlighting the need for targeted coping strategies. (Smith, P. K., Mahdavi 2008).

Hinduja and Patchin's research on cyber bullying among university students revealed that approximately 20-25% had experienced some form of cyber victimization. The study emphasized that cyberbullying could occur even in college settings; challenging the assumption that it's only a high school issue. (Hinduja, 2010).

Their work examined the role of social support and coping mechanisms. Students who had strong peer support and used active coping strategies such as reporting or confronting the bully were less likely to experience severe psychological consequences. (Robie, 2012)

This research investigated gender differences in cyber bullying. It showed that while both male and female college students are affected, females are more likely to use passive coping strategies such as ignoring the bully, whereas males might retaliate or disengage completely from online platforms (Ruiz-Oliva, R. 2013).

### Methodology

This cross-sectional study was conducted among undergraduate medical students from a private medical college, following the acquisition of informed consent. All students from first to final year who were present on campus during the study period were invited to participate. The response rate was 50%. Participants completed a set of standardized self-report questionnaires using pen and paper, which took about 20 minutes. The following tools were used:

#### A. Cyber bullying and Cyber victimization Questionnaire:

This 20-item instrument evaluates both cyber bullying (10 items) and cyber victimization (10 items) over the past year, considering both frequency and the emotional impact of the incidents. It encompasses various online platforms such as mobile phones, emails, websites, social media, text messages, and online gaming. A participant was classified as a cyber bully if they reported engaging in any of the 10 behaviors at least 1–2 times in the past

year. Similarly, a cyber victim was defined as someone who experienced any of the 14 behaviors with the same minimum frequency.

### B. Coping with Cyber bullying Questionnaire:

This 36-item scale assesses seven types of coping strategies used by victims of cyber bullying, including seeking advice, support from family and friends, ignoring the behavior, self-blame, technical coping, assertiveness, and retaliation.

### C. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale:

This 15-item questionnaire evaluates symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, with seven items dedicated to each domain. Responses are based on experiences over the past two weeks and are rated on a four-point scale.

### D. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:

This is a widely used 5 item scale designed to assess self-esteem. Participants respond on a four-point Likers scale ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. The scale is both reliable and valid for measuring self-esteem.

### Discussion

Our research revealed that a significant proportion of college students (50%) had experienced some form of cyber bullying. Similar trends have been observed in studies involving schoolchildren, with one report by Microsoft indicating a prevalence of 40%. However, there is a lack of data specifically focused on college students in India, highlighting the need for further research to confirm these findings.

1. The most frequently reported form of cyber victimization was unauthorized photographing and online posting (30.28%). This was followed by incidents involving derogatory name-calling, particularly homophobic and racial slurs (15%), and the unsolicited receipt of sexually explicit content (12%). These forms of cyber bullying are also commonly noted in studies conducted among Portuguese university students. In contrast, threats sent via email or text message were relatively rare.
2. Cyber bullying often stems from motivations such as asserting social dominance, seeking revenge, entertainment, or an attempt to establish control. Unlike traditional bullying, cyber bullies are usually detached from the immediate emotional consequences of their actions, which can lead to a lack of empathy and unchecked aggression—even when the victim is someone known to them.
3. The most frequently employed coping mechanisms among the victims included technical strategies (like limiting personal information shared online, blocking suspected perpetrators on social media, and managing privacy settings), seeking emotional support from friends and family, and directly confronting the bully. Feelings of helplessness and self-blame were not commonly reported. These patterns are in line with previous findings, which suggest that victims often turn to close social networks for support, limit online engagement, enhance privacy settings, or emotionally distance themselves from the incidents.
4. Understanding how victims cope is crucial, as coping strategies can significantly affect psychological well-being. Research into traditional bullying indicates that problem-focused coping tends to be more effective than avoidance or emotionally driven coping strategies. Past studies also show that cyber bullying can have a negative impact on academic performance and mental health, often resulting in low self-esteem, behavioral issues, and interpersonal difficulties. Longitudinal research involving adolescents

has found that high levels of neuroticism and depression are predictors of both cyber bullying and victimization. Our study supports these findings, reinforcing the link between cyber bullying, depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem.

5. Despite the insights offered by this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Being based on an online survey, the findings may be subject to selection bias, self-reporting inaccuracies, and recall bias. As a cross-sectional study, it cannot establish causal relationships between variables like self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and cyber victimization. Nevertheless, in the context of the growing influence of social media in students' lives, our study provides important and timely insights into the often-overlooked issue of cyber bullying among college students.

### Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into cyber bullying among students, particularly in relation to the psychological challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ. While the high incidence of cyber bullying is a cause for concern, it is encouraging to note that many young individuals are aware of and make use of effective coping strategies. The findings can contribute to the formulation of informed and practical responses by policymakers, educational institutions, parents, and peers, and pave the way for future research in this important area.

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