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#### **CYBER-BULLYING: VICTIMIZATION OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

#### DR. AARTI TOLIA VISITING PROFESSOR SNDT LAW SCHOOL MUMBAI

#### ABSTRACT

India is said to be a developing country with various new fields emerging with challenging areas, one of them is technology. India saw various phases and through globalization made advancement in science and technology and introduced a new era in history. The Indian society is undergoing change day by day. The advent of computers made India a different nation then what it used to be where everything in India is now online from 'online shopping to online education' the education sector saw a different phase where the students prefer Google and Wikipedia for school and college projects, references, history etc. Further the 24x7 use of cell phones with easy internet access has been an attraction to one and all where the young generation prefers to socialize majorly through social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, chat-rooms and YouTube, thereby creating a new arena for concerned research on the reckless use of cyberspace by the teens. There are some aspects of cyber-torts that have received too little attention from the government of India such as cyber-bullying in the youth. It is crucial to take a different view and evaluate the risks arising out of cyber-bullying based on the recent suicide cases. The present paper seeks to highlight on victimization of young girls on social networking sites like Facebook etc.

#### **KEYWORDS**

cyberspace, social networking sites, bullying.

#### INTRODUCTION

laying pranks and teasing each other in the real world has been considered as light mischief in the developing stage of children. But the same mischief when carried on carelessly via internet may have negative aftereffects and is termed as cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices."

An alarming amount of girls are involved in cyber bullying, as much as 26% of reported cases as found by the cyber bullying research centre compared to only about 17% of boys, where girls may be victim as well as culprits. The users keep playing pranks and post nasty messages without witnessing their victim's reaction unlike that of face-to-face bullying such as insult, humiliation or crying of the victim.

Parry Aftab, a cyberspace security and privacy lawyer an executive director of WiredSafety.org, which serves for internet safety education and cyber ethics stated that the recent trend adopted by cyber-bullies is posting humiliating videos of those whom they dislike. The United States - philanthropist who pioneered this technology has left no stone unturned to ensure protection of online youth with de-rigueur aggressive enforcement and regulations. Comparatively India has no law till date for online youth safety; it seems the law makers have sneaking suspicion of online minor's issue to be minor and hence tossed aside it in the tech-age. The only available Act in India to bring to book online offences is the Information Technology Act 2000 as amended in 2008, which in its Section 67B addresses child-pornography and also the word 'children' has been imbedded for first time in the Act.

The survey conducted by the cyber-bullying research center states that 45.8% adolescent girls reported of being ignored online, 42.9% said that they were disrespected, 11.2% reported of being threatened on social networking sites. Similarly spreading false rumours and gossip was reported by 40% of girls. Adolescent girls have also complained of receiving online threatening messages of being killed or injured. Where parents need to be the first source of contact, very few girls prefer to inform their parents or another adult about their cyber victimization. Teen girls often complaint about the meanness lurking on social media, wherein one out of 5 girls ages 14 to 17 say people her age are mostly unkind to each other on social media. And one out of 3 girls ages 12 to 13 thinks the same.<sup>2</sup>

Many girls who experience name-calling, gossiping, and other common forms of adolescent harassment perpetrated online exhibit healthy resilience to this behaviour whereas some prefer to respond to online bullying by cyber-bullying back.

#### THE AFTER-EFFECTS

Cyber bullying preceded the teens' depression, hinting at a causal relationship. Various research have found that the more cyber bullying a teen experienced, the more severe the teen girl's symptoms of depression.<sup>3</sup> Cyber-bullying has risky after effects on teen girls future as well as during and after being bullied and increases the risk of developing number of health and psychological problems.<sup>4</sup> Such after effects of being bullied on Social Networking sites may create emotional distress after or during using the internet, the girl may stop socializing with friends and family and cut off from group gathering and often skip school with a considerable change in mood, sleep and appetite, the grades may fall and she may become aggressive at home for no big reason. The social networking sites like Facebook may cause *'Facebook Depression'* a term framed by the American Academy of Paediatrics resulting in a feeling of unpopularity of being excluded from the events or group from peer circle. Many teens have to go through lower self-esteem, loneliness and disillusionment and gradual distrust of people. There have been cases where bullying aftereffect drives the adolescent's girl victim to self-harm with increased aggression towards friends and family and sometimes suicide due to shame and embarrassment of the harsh online comments.

TABLE 1									
Victim Girl	Suicide method	Year	Age of the victim	SNS	Country				
Teen girl from Kandivali/Mumbai	Hanged	2013	14	Facebook	India				
Hannah Smith <sup>5</sup>	Hanged	2012	14	Ask.fm	UK				
Ms. Phoebe Prince <sup>6</sup>	Hang herself from a stairwell	2010	15	Facebook	USA				
Indian girl studying in the Siliguri Government Polytechnic College	Suicide	2010	18	MMS video via YouTube	India				
Sarah Butler Lynn <sup>7</sup>	Hanged	2009	12	MySpace	USA				
Peter Chapman <sup>8</sup>	Raped and murder teen girls	2009	Teens	Facebook	UK				
Megan Meier Taylor <sup>9</sup>	Hanged	2006	13	MySpace AOL Instant Messenge	USA				
Rachael Neblett <sup>10</sup>	Shot herself with Gun	2006	17	MySpace	USA				

These are the few cases that have come to limelight, but there are several unregistered and ignored cases which never come to the notice of the society, parents and friends. The Indian culture and society fear is also another aspect where women are threatened by multiple forms of violence including burnings, acid attacks, beatings, rape and cyber- bullying-a new form of violence carried online.

Cyber bullying is an online violence against teen girls that is perpetrated not only, or even mostly by peers, close family member and friends, strangers but also from spouses and rejected love proposals and overall 'collective conscience of society' was what produced their barbarism."

Crime Patrol the Indian crime reality television series telecasted on Sony Entertainment Television Asia, has shown several real stories where women have been blackmailed and pressurized fearing that their (confidential and private) video clips would be made public.

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#### CONCLUSION

India has no laws directly addressing this issue of cyber bullying and hence is covered under the topics of harassment and harm, defaming and humiliating teens. Government of India needs to look into this issue seriously and enact legislation governing internet with respect to cyber bullying as exists in United States. Several cases of video- voyeurism have led to insecurity and blackmailing women in the past, making the cyber- space and related technology creating only fear in adolescent girls hence teens peer aggression in real or virtual world should not be overlooked as repercussion of been victimized online may have a vulnerable real world implication.

The menace of cyber bullying can be curbed in collaboration with adults, parents, teachers' friends and school authorities. As such it also is the responsibility of all adults to be friendly and interact with kids about any such instance & make them feel protective. The wild & bold use of internet by criminals with less or no fear of law and/or internet, appeals an appropriate mechanism conjointly with appropriate laws.

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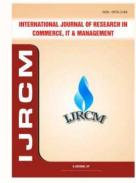
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