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Impact of Cyberbullying Pertaining to Health Amongst Male and Female Secondary School Students in Mumbai.

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Abstract:

A significant challenge in today's times that remains majorly in urban settings associated with extensive web access is of cyberbullying. The current research paper studies the gender differences on the impact of cyberbullying pertaining to general health amongst secondary school students in Mumbai. The sample comprised of 1622 students (Male= 823 Female=801) from 10 schools in the city. Cyberbullying scale by Stewart & John Young was used to measure cyberbullying and General Health Questionnaire by D. P. Goldberg and V. F. Hillier was used for this purpose. No significant difference was observed amongst male (M=10.15, SD=8.64) and female (M=9.53, SD=7.68) students, t (1622) = 1.54, p>.05

Findings suggest that that there is no significant difference when it comes to experiencing cyberbullying in the urban settings, as both genders are equally vulnerable as well as aware of the ramifications and physical and mental health issues associated. These findings facilitate exploring the psychological and social dynamics interplay in the experience of cyberbullying in Mumbai providing insight for tailored actions for forestalling and salubrity.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, gender, teenagers, mental health, psychosocial.*

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Introduction

Cybernetic mechanism permeates many people's lives, especially, teenagers from screen time to digital learning to fostering virtual connections and utilizing social communication tools (Ngantcha, et al., 2018 and Ofcom U., 2016). Subsequent to the 2007 iPhone launch and the android operating system launched in 2008 the performance specifications of digital devices have gained greater portability, and so have their prevalence and ubiquity, augmenting ownership of gizmo by teenagers to kindergarten (Mascheroni and Cuman, 2014 and Ofcom U. 2017).

Even though advantages and prospects enabled by cellular technology, concerns have been expressed about the burgeoning development of harmful online behaviour involving trolling, cyberstalking, doxing, flaming, hateful speech and defamation, cyberbullying, against teenagers as indicated by sources are far-reaching on internet community (Kwan and Skoric, 2013 and Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, et al., 2008). Snapchat and Instagram have garnered more active users than Facebook in prominence in adolescence (Statista, 2019). National press coverage of adolescent self- harm and suicides associated with cyberbullying boosted its political clout (Adams, 2019 and Lynch, 2018). In the face of serious concerns shared between parent- professional partnership/ interprofessional collaboration and teenagers, the U.K government published the digital charter in 2018 (Digital Charter, Department for Digital Culture Media & Sport, 2018) regarding technology facilitated violence/ abuse instituting procedures and protocols for the information highway and commenced examination of repercussions of social networking and screen time on teenager's psychological health and mental balance (All Party Parliamentary Group, House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2019). This necessitated corporate social responsibility (CSR) and legislated code of conduct and accountable reporting (Digital Charter, Department for Digital Culture Media & Sport, 2018). It is expected that new enactments put to effect guarantee content moderation and make user safety a prime concern particularly for teenagers, children and at-risk adults.

By and large, 20-40 percent of teenagers has been cyberbullied at least once in a lifetime (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, et al., 2008; Kowalski, et al., 2008; Dehue, et al., 2008; Patchin and Hinduja, 2008; Li, 2007 and 2008; Aricak, Siyahhan, Uzunhasanoglu, et al., 2008; Topçu, Erdur-Baker, and Çapa-Aydin, 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004) and is closely connected with depression, low self-esteem (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006) and suicidal ideation (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010).

Variables linked to cyberbullying showed discrepancies in different investigations. Nonetheless, the preponderance of evidence suggests that memoirs of conventional bullying was subjected to online abuse (Ybarra, 2004; Chang, et al., 2013; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006; Sourander, et al., 2010; Schneider, et al., 2012; Wang, Nansel, Iannotti, et al., 2011). Factors linked with cyberbullying included extensive use of daily internet use more than three hours (Ybarra, 2004; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006; Sourander, et al., 2010), use of instant messaging (Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006; Sourander, et al., 2010), relationship problems (Ybarra, 2004; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006; Sourander, et al., 2010), hyperactivity-inattention problems, behaviour problems (Sourander, et al., 2010), school related problems (Chang, et al., 2013; Sourander, et al., 2010; Schneider, et al., 2012) and unsafe internet behaviour, disclosing personal details streaming online and cyber harassment (Ybarra, 2004; Chang, et al., 2013; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008; Ybarra, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2006).

Teenagers in current times run at a risk of distinct social dynamics integrated technologically and social networking, for instance digital bullying, likely to amplify their vulnerability for mental disorders and suicidal ideation.

Digital victimization is linked with teenager's mental health challenges (Fisher, et al., 2016; Bannink, et al., 2014; Hinduja and Patchin, 2010). For instance, a recent meta-analysis indicated a correlation between digital victimization as well as emotional (depression, anxiety, anger) and misbehaviour (aggression, substance use, risky sexual behaviour) with Pearson's ranging from 0.14 to 0.34 (Fisher, et al., 2016).

In spite of the fact that digital victimization connected with heightened risk of teenager's mental illness, it is vague whether the extent of the risk differs for males v. females. Given teenager females' predisposition to depression in the context of strained relationships (Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus, 1994), it is reasonable to assume that this vulnerability may encompass to cyberbullying (Bor, et al., 2014; Hammen, 2003).

In accordance with previous research findings, teenager females showed considerably higher rates of

occurrence of digital victimization than their male equivalent (Beckman, Hagquist and Hellstrom, 2013). This unequal risk of harm is somewhat interpretable by identity-specific social networks. For instance, findings point that female teenagers are inclined to use social media for interpersonal relationships than their male counterparts (Barlett and Coyne, 2014) tend to experience relational aggression more often.

The government of India stated 10.5% of youthful adult being cyber harassed (Mukherjee, et al., 2019), on the other hand Bangladesh found 32% of teenagers aged 14-17 were those targeted by online harassment, with 27% grappling with emotional suffering (Mallik and Radwan, 2020).

Extensive research has shown that digital victimization results in adverse effects throughout the formative years of teenagers, with subjected to online harassment prone to depression and anxiety, along with engaging in self-harming behaviours and experiencing suicidal ideation (Nguyen, Nakamura and Seino, et al., 2020; John, Glendenning and Marchant, et al., 2018; van Geel, Vedder and Tanilon, 2014; Maurya, et al., 2022).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To determine the level of cyberbullying experienced by secondary school students in Mumbai.
- To assess the effects of cyberbullying on the general health of secondary school students in Mumbai.

HYPOTHESIS:

- There will be a statistically significant difference on the impact of cyberbullying pertaining to health of male and female secondary school students in Mumbai.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Prevalence of Cyberbullying amongst adolescents

The digitization of our communications including internet access has led to rapid increase in cybercrimes. One such crime is cyberbullying which has become prevalent amongst adolescents due to their new found freedom and changing interest in the online community making them easy victims. The combination of smartphones, social media applications where instant messaging has become the new trend has led to cyberbullying becoming a global crime surpassing the geographical and country boundaries (Zhu et al., 2021). It is a type of crime where digital media is used to break laws by expressing anger and aggressive behaviour leading to issues like harassment, threats and humiliation of the victims. Due to the digital platform, it can be anonymous making it difficult to trace back to the criminal. Also, the crime's social media presence leading to public access makes it much more traumatizing to victims leading to psychological consequences.

It was highlighted that adolescents are generally susceptible to the psychological consequences of cyberbullying due to the developments they are undergoing (Kwan et al., 2020 and Bottino et al., 2015). They also reported that cyberbullying shows associations with depression, anxiety and suicidal tendency. It was also observed that very less research has been carried out for the same in developing countries, however, the same cannot be said about developed countries where mental health and cyber safety both are integral parts of peoples' lives.

Role of gender in Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying Victimization has different predictors, out of which gender remains one of the most consistently explored predictors. The early studies have shown that makes are more likely to perpetrate and females are the victims, recent studies show overlapping patterns. In one study, it was demonstrated that gender guides the experience and perception of bullying, generally female adolescents show higher level of psychological distress, males try to downplay their experience or turn to aggression and substance use (Perazzini et al., 2025).

The study analyzed the data from 2019 Youth Risk Behaviour Survey in the America and found that female adolescents are more likely to report cyberbullying showed higher levels of suicidality. It also revealed that although both genders experience cyberbullying, females show longer psychological consequences such as depression and self-harm (Levine et al., 2022). Another study supported this as they found that there is a correlation between gender and cyberbullying victimization leading to outcomes where females have internal symptoms- depression and anxiety while males show external behaviors (Kim et al., 2019). The above findings were true for another study conducted in Nepal focusing on female adolescents in which they identified that cyberbullying has led to elevated levels of depression and stress. The study also highlights the socio-

cultural expectations of females leading to a burden on them (Khadka et al., 2024).

There were also conflicts regarding the universality of gender- based differences observed in cyberbullying and its victimization. One such study highlights the fact that with increase in exposure to digital presence, the gender gap is reduced amongst urban adolescents as both the genders are becoming more active digital platform users which may lead to convergence of psychological and physical consequences (Kumar and Goldstein, 2020).

A study done on India links cyberbullying victimization to socioeconomic background of the victims. It has worked on the social status in the school environments (Suraseth and Koraneekij, 2024). The empirical studies in Indian settings are limited; there is no study done on cyberbullying in the school context in urban areas like Mumbai. Such a study may help show the realities of the cultures and how they can be changed to prevent cyberbullying.

Consequences on physical and psychological health

The impact of cyberbullying on mental health is not just about emotional, behavioural and physical domains, it is also about the disorders that may follow and how to prevent them. One such study was conducted where they explored the association between cyberbullying victims and residual depression symptoms among the adolescents having psychiatric disorders during the time of COVID- 19 pandemic. They demonstrated that cyberbullying is the central focus that links various depression symptoms like insomnia, hopelessness and low self-esteem (Xie et al., 2023). This study reinforces the concept that cyberbullying not only triggers new psychological symptoms but also exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities.

In a similar case study, the authors found evidence linking cyberbullying to a wide range of health issues- sleep disturbances, psychosomatic and emotional dysregulations (Bottino et al., 2015). Kim et al., (2019) found that both the genders showed increase in substance use as a consequence of trying to cope up with the stress. This was supported by another study that further linked cyberbullying to poor academic performance due to reduced focus on studies (Obregón-Cuesta et al., 2022).

The study review by Zhu et al. (2021) provides an overview of cyberbullying, it's risks and prevention, highlighting that lack of digital awareness, more usage of social media and no parental supervision are few of the strongest factors leading to cyberbullying. It also revealed the resilient building factors such as empathy, peer support groups and digital education which may help in providing prevention or avoidance of cyberbullying.

Key takeaways and Research direction

The study of cyberbullying across cultures has revealed that cyberbullying may be a global concern, however, it's perception and psychological consequences vary in different cultures. One such study found that Thai secondary school students' experiences in terms of cyberbullying were influenced by their background status and frequency of digital platform usage (Suraseth and Koraneekij, 2024). It was highlighted in another study that identity formation during adolescence stage can affect the impact of cyberbullying. Also, the bullying behaviours is shaped by the influence of gender and self- concept (Perazzini et al., 2025). Similarly, in countries where maximum population has low to middle income households, there is still stigma attached to mental health and limited access to psychological well-being leading to less awareness about psychological impacts of cyberbullying (Khadka et al., 2024).

The prevention of cyberbullying has seen efforts being shifted from punishments to victims such as ban on social media usage, etc. to mental health promotion. This can be seen in the studies as they're advocating integration of cyber- safety protocols into education curriculum and emphasizes on the emotional intelligence and digital responsibility (Kwan et al., 2020). Similarly, another study proposed a pediatric framework for mental health screening and community-based support for cyberbullying victims (Kumar and Goldstein, 2020).

Overall, the reviewed literature underscores that cyberbullying is an issue that is affecting adolescents worldwide. Gender plays a crucial role in determining the intensity and nature of cyberbullying and its psychological outcomes. The studies show higher vulnerability among females, other studies reveal less gender disparities in cyberbullying's impact on general health. However, empirical studies in Indian settings specifically in urban context remain limited, highlighting the importance of localized analysis cyberbullying on different genders and its impact within school settings.

METHODOLOGY:

Research design:

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study to measure gender differences on the impact of cyberbullying pertaining to health amongst secondary school students in Mumbai. The research aimed to examine the prevalence and mental repercussions of online harassment and to ascertain whether gender disparities in its impact were observed statistically.

Participants:

A total of 1624 secondary school students of grade 8th & 9th in Mumbai participated in the research out of which the total no. of males was 823 and females 801 respectively between the age group 13-17 years. The researchers applied a stratified sampling technique to achieve diversity across socioeconomic and educational strata. A formal letter was sent before to the school seeking permission for data collection following which data collection commenced. All the participants remained assured of confidentiality and ethical binding regarding confidentiality of obtained results as well as their identity, and that the data collected shall be solely used for research purpose only.

Tools of assessment:

1. Cyberbullying assessment scale

Cyberbullying was evaluated by using the Cyberbullying scale developed by Stewart and John Young (2014) measuring participant's experience as a victim of cyberbullying. It also assesses the frequency and types of online aggressive behaviours a teenager experiences within past few months. The test items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where a score of 0 represents "never", 4 represents "always", the total number of items on the scale being 14. Higher scores on this scale indicate more experiences with cyberbullying victimization.

2. General Health Questionnaire

The general health questionnaire developed by Goldberg and Hillier (1979) was used by the researchers. The items of the test are rated on a four-point scale i.e., "not at all" to "much more than usual". The scaled GHQ-28 was used for this study. The test is extensively used for screening psychological distress amongst teenagers.

PROCEDURE:

Prior to the commencement of data collection, permission was obtained from the school authorities. A rapport was established before the actual testing session began with the participants. Further, objectives of carrying out the research were discussed. The data collection was carried for both the psychological tests and the testing session was kept in group settings. Approximately 30-40 minutes was the time span required for test completion. All the queries of the participants were resolved during the session, if any. It was ascertained, that all participants understood the instructions imparted and then the testing session was carried out.

Data analysis:

The data collected was analysed statistically using SPSS. Mean and standard deviation for both male and female participants were computed. Gender differences in cyberbullying were determined with the help of an independent t-test. No significant difference was observed amongst male ($M=10.15$, $SD=8.64$) and female ($M=9.53$, $SD=7.68$) students, $t(1622) = 1.54$, $p>.05$

DISCUSSION:

Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, consequent to the implementation of public health strategies, network connectivity and related digital activities have escalated rapidly (Masalimova, et al., 2022) in all capacities presenting difficulties especially challenging for novices and naïve adolescence (Hawdon et al., 2020). Also, a number of adolescents neglected their studies during the pandemic and had early digital access and it may enhance the potential for cyberbullying (Kwaning, et al., 2022).

Moreover, the necessary public health measures, including mandatory quarantine and lockdowns, had a transformative effect on the public's way of life and precipitated anxiety and irritability (Xiang et al., 2020a) that could have augmented the possibility for excessive internet use and online harassment. Moreover, given the dearth of knowledge concerning SAARC SARS-CoV-2, during the incipient phase of the pandemic, fabrication and hearsay about COVID-19, details of the containment procedures circulated rampantly on social networks to mention a few like Tik-Tok, WeChat, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, escalating into hostile online interactions. The research outcomes on gender disparities in cyberbullying are discrepant from the outcomes observed in studies documenting male (Yang et al.,

2014; Calvete et al., 2010; Chang et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2018), or female (Smith et al., 2006; Sourander et al., 2010) prevalence or gender-neutral (Li, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Livingstone et al., 2011).

The reported rate of cyberbullying is highly inconsistent across different studies (4.8%−72%) (Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Sourander et al., 2010; Kowalski et al., 2014; Hutson, 2016; Jadambaa, et al., 2019) reviewing the discrepancies across different study settings, demographics and evaluation tools.

Topographically, some research has indicated that teenagers based in cities are more likely to be more commonly targeted by online harassment than their peers in suburban areas (Rose and Tynes, 2015). Predictors of online harassment as an individual, it is generally understood that mature adolescents, persons aged 15 and above, are at increased risk of involvement in cyberbullying (Álvarez-García, et al., 2015; Buelga, et al., 2020).

Locational differences show that there is a higher prevalence of internet harassment among students in metropolitan areas than their rural counterparts (Olumide, Adams and Amodu, 2016).

In spite of persistent discourse on the vulnerabilities that make children and adolescents susceptible to cyberbullying, certain elements remain a point of contention namely, user attributes, and the prevalence of online harm. For cyber victims, some studies contend that mature adolescents are subject to cyber victimization (Huang, et al., 2020; Tesler, et al., 2019; Morin, et al., 2018; Kyrrestad, et al.,2025).

For online harassment, Álvarez-García identified gender disparities may have consequential on online harassment (Álvarez-García, et al., 2017), although opinions conflicted (Olenik-Shemesh and Heiman, 2012; Katz, et al., 2019; Cénat, et al., 2014; Hoareau, et al., 2023). Research findings indicate that males reported more often to have been victimized online to become online offender (Lee and Shin, 2017; Mishna, et al., 2009; Horzum and Ayas, 2014; Horzum, Ayas, Randler and Düşünceli, 2021). Khurana et al. argued the contrary, positing that females are less aggressive (Khurana, et al., 2015). With regard to online activity, it has been claimed that frequent internet use among students correlates with an elevated risk of perpetration of becoming online offenders (Olumide, Adams and Amodu, 2016), however other researchers found that there was no significant correlation between internet usage and cyberbullying perpetration (Álvarez-García, et al., 2017).

The current research paper studied gender differences on the impact of cyberbullying pertaining to health amongst secondary school students in Mumbai. The data reveal no discernable differences in outcomes based on gender i.e. male (M=10.15, SD=8.64) and female (M=9.53, SD=7.68) students (1622) =1.54, p >.05. Findings indicate that both male and female students experience cyberbullying at equivalent levels, and its correlation with general health concerns is similarly distributed across genders. The absence of statistical significance suggests that gender does not substantially affect as a key factor in influencing the extent or health impact of cyberbullying in this urban adolescent population.

These outcomes correspond with earlier research indicating a gradual reduction in the gender gap in cyberbullying. Studies by Smith et al. (2019) and Hinduja and Patchin (2018) ascertained that male and female teenagers now engage online in much the same way, leaving them equally exposed to potential cyberbullying threats. In the digital realm, anonymity, uninterrupted online presence, and comparable access to social platforms often neutralize or weaken or gender-based variations formerly observed in face-to-face bullying.

Therefore, the result showing $p > .05$ suggests that any detected mean difference between male and female participants is statistically insignificant, reinforcing the notion that both genders are comparably susceptible within the online environment. The closely aligned mean values (10.15 for males and 9.53 for females) further indicate that both groups may undergo similar levels of psychological stress and overall health difficulties associated with cyberbullying.

Previous studies, such as those by Tokunaga (2010) and Kowalski et al. (2014), emphasize that factors like coping mechanisms, peer support, and self-esteem possess a stronger predictive influence on the psychological outcomes of cyberbullying than gender itself. Consequently, the lack of gender-based variation in the present findings may be attributable to common stressors—including academic demands, social comparison, and extensive digital engagement in urban school settings—which tend to affect both boys and girls in much the same way**.**

Nevertheless, cultural and social dynamics may still shape the way cyberbullying is interpreted and reported. Earlier Indian research (e.g., Sengupta and Chaudhuri, 2011) indicates that boys may downplay or underreport victimization because of societal expectations of resilience, whereas girls may

internalize emotional distress yet remain reluctant to disclose it openly. Although these patterns may offset each other in statistical analyses, subtle qualitative differences in emotional responses may still lie beneath the numerical results.

From an applied perspective, the findings highlight the need for gender-inclusive intervention measures. Since both male and female students showed comparable vulnerability and similar health outcomes, prevention efforts should emphasize digital citizenship training, emotional self-regulation, and online empathy, rather than assuming gender-based variations in risk. Urban schools, such as those in Mumbai, can introduce awareness programs, peer-support structures, and accessible counselling services to mitigate the psychological consequences of cyberbullying for all students.

In summary, the statistical outcome ($t(1622) = 1.54$, $p > .05$) verifies that no significant gender-based difference exists in the impact of cyberbullying on general health among secondary school learners in Mumbai. Both genders appear equally exposed and affected, reinforcing the need for comprehensive, gender-neutral strategies to support cyberbullying prevention and adolescent well-being in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION-

The current research explored whether the consequences of cyberbullying on physical and mental health vary by gender of secondary school students in Mumbai. No significant difference was observed in the data collected from 1,622 students with respect to gender disparities in cyberbullying victimization and related health impacts .The findings indicate that cyberbullying vulnerability in urban areas is equitably distributed across genders ,given widespread digital access and online engagement.

The gender equality in cyberbullying victimization and perpetration highlights the need to view it as a universal concern, not one limited to specific demographic groups. It sheds light on the critical role of psychological and social mechanisms that moulds student's virtual engagement and their retaliation to digital victimization.

Crucially, this study provides new insights into the teenage experience of digital victimization in Mumbai and prioritizes the development of comprehensive, integrated models of school that focus on prevention and psychological interventions that are aimed at ensuring student welfare, regardless of gender.

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