

CYBER BULLYING: AN EMERGING THREAT TO PUPIL WELL-BEING

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Today's youth is using technology more than ever. Most of the youth have an easy access to internet and many other information and communication technologies (ICTs). Many adolescents spend hours texting, messaging and interacting with their friends online. Technology and social media has made it possible for us to have an immediate access to information and has also connected us with other people around the globe. However, it has also provided some people with the sources to harass and exploit innocent people, commit crimes and inflict injury upon others. It has allowed the youth to take bullying that flourished in school hallways into cyber space. This newest form of bullying is known as Cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying is an aggressive act or behaviour that is carried out using electronic means by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. It is a relatively recent phenomenon. The term 'Cyber bullying' was coined by Canadian educator Bill Belsey. Every year a large number of adolescents fall prey to cyber bullying.

Major forms of cyber bullying are Flaming: electronic transmission of angry or rude messages; Harassment: repeatedly sending insulting or threatening messages; Denigration: put-downs; spreading cruel rumours; Impersonation or Masquerading: pretending to be someone else online and sharing information to damage a person's reputation; Outing: revealing personal information about a person which was shared by other person in confidence; Trickery: tricking the victim to reveal any embarrassing information, secrets, or confidential matters and then sharing it with others online, Exclusion: maliciously leaving a person out of a group online, such as a chatline or a game; ganging up on one individual; Cyber-stalking: threats of harm or intimidation; and Cyber-threats: threats or distressing material, general statements that create the impression of the writer being emotionally upset and perhaps considering to harm himself/herself or someone else. Instant messaging (IM), E-Mail, Mobile phones, Chat rooms, Social Networking Sites, Blogs or weblogs and Websites are major sources of cyber bullying.

Research has documented various negative social, emotional, physical, mental, educational and behavioural consequences of cyber bullying for all those involved. Hyperactive behaviour, depression, high levels of aggression, conduct problems, feelings of insecurity, delinquent behaviour, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, frustration, feeling angry, various other psychological and behavioural problems, somatic complaints like headaches and stomach aches, illicit substance use, impaired concentration affecting school performance, truancy, anxiety, fear of being rejected, excluded or humiliated, loneliness, feelings of isolation, delinquency, aggression, weapon-carrying, poor parent-caregiver relationship, high levels of stress and various

other social and emotional difficulties are associated with Cyber bullying. Also, there are inconsistent results regarding gender differences in cyber bullying. Majority of cyber bullying research has shown that no particular gender has greater involvement in cyber bullying than the other.

Cyber bullying has grave consequences that go far beyond hurt feelings and these effects are far reaching having the potential to do serious damage to young people. It is not just a passing 'phase' , it has profound impact on the lives of millions and it is not going to slow down unless we act fast. The solemnity of this issue warrants collaborative efforts by schools , teachers and parents to remedy and prevent this psychosocial evil. Potential solutions and effective prevention strategies should be developed to protect youngsters from its far reaching negative consequences.