

## Cyberbullying: Impact on adolescence

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**Abstract:** Cyber bullying is using technology to harass, threaten and embarrass others. It generally occurs with young people. When adults involve in it, it becomes ‘cyber harassment’ or ‘cyber stalking’. It refers to a deliberate and constantly repeated social behaviour. The use of internet and its potential anonymity are a recipe for disaster when it comes to bullying. Few measures to fight with the issue are :

- responsible sharing of information on internet,
- education must be made available through schools and activities,
- creating awareness etc.

The prevention begins first with communication and hence an easy environment should be provided to adolescents so that they may share their problems. New laws are needed to curb cyber bullying.

**Key Words:** cyberbullying, adolescents, harassment, vulnerability, revenge, mandate.

### Introduction:

“Cyber-bullying”- The use of internet, cell phones and other digital technologies to harass, intimidate, threaten, mock and defame. It is a typical type of online harassment, which can be defined as hurling harsh, rude, insulting, teasing remarks through the open forums targeting one’s body shape and structure, qualifications, family, gender orientation, personal habits and outlook.

Experts say cyber bullying has become a scourge of the adolescent world, inflicting painful scars on youngsters and vexing adults unable to stop abuse. While many instances are relatively harmless, others can have serious, long lasting effects, ranging from acute emotional distress, academic problems and school absenteeism to violence, a desire for revenge and vulnerability to sexual predation. Still, a reliable profile of cyber bullying is difficult to construct. Research is in its infancy, experts who measure online abuse define it in different ways and many incidents are difficult to tally accurately.

**Factors responsible:** The ‘pell-mell’ expansion in the use of technology has fuelled cyber bullying’s growth. The rise of networking sites, personal web pages and blogs brimming with the minutiae of teen antics and angst has helped to create a rich climate for cyber myhem. Locker-rooms, photos snapped with cell-phones and broadcast on internet, fake profiles created on social networking sites, salacious rumours spread in chat rooms, threats zapped across town in instant messages.

The another reason for cyber bullying is “*status in school- popularity, hierarchies, who’s cool, who’s not*”, says Danah Boyd, a fellow at Berkman center for Internet and society at Harvard Law School who studies teen’s behaviour on MySpace, Facebook and other social networking sites.

**Indian context:** According to ‘Tween, Teens and Technology 2014’ report by Mc. Afee, 50% of Indian youth have had some experiences with cyber bullying (been cyber bullied online or witnessed others being so treated), out of which one-third (36%) have themselves been bullied. Children in **India** reported **the third highest bullying rate**, after China and Singapore, among the 25 countries surveyed under a recently commissioned project by Microsoft Corporation to understand the global pervasiveness of online bullying. 21% of suicides among Indian adolescents are due to trauma of cyber bullying suffered by victims.

**Laws in this reference:** The present legal system proved as “Band aid” to the issue without addressing the root causes. Cyber bullying has impelled law makers to either pass anti-bullying laws or add cyber

bullying to existing statutes. Some laws are propelled by a mix of concern about electronic bullying and sexual predators. But using laws and courts to stop cyber bullying has been tricky and sometimes highly controversial. *“There’s a big conflict in knowing where to draw a line between things that are rude and things that are illegal”*, says Parry Aftab, an Internet privacy and security lawyer who is Executive Director of wired-safety.org.

Criminal laws have failed to keep up with technological revolutions, including the onset of cyber bullying. The criminal laws relating internet somewhere provide extreme rude provisions when compared with the interpretation of matter in issue. But civil libertarians and other express concerns about the waves of new cyber laws. Some argue that educating students and parents of harmful consequences of online abuse, instituting school-based prevention programmes and promulgating clear school policies on harassment are more effective than passing laws.

**Progress made:** child advocates and researchers continue to look for ways to curb cyber abuse. Social networking sites offer tools to help them do that, including safety tips, settings to block unwanted communications and protect user privacy and admonitions to report hateful or harassing content. The Information Technology Act, 2000 states punishments to all those publishing information which is obscene as also to any of breach in privacy and confidentiality. The Indian Penal Code also covers the issue. Apart from legal help, victims can also hire private investigators specialising in tracking down cyber bullies. For those who want to find culprits on their own, can simply google reverse e-mail finder to find a list of websites which can help unmask the bully. These websites primarily track the e-mail address down to its user and return the user identity as also some other personal information. Use of digital parenting apps like eKAVACH can filter or block a cyber bully’s text.

As technology gets faster, cheaper and far reaching, cyber bullying is sure to grow ....and the growth will demand a clear guidance from courts and policy makers on the responsibility of schools, law enforcement officials and online network providers. The schools must follow an approach wherein students are taken through lesson or session by teachers or counsellors in Emotional management, Problem Solving, Empathy and Assertiveness Skills. The schools could also have a “Family Engagement” program. The parents must also be actively involved in sensitization programs. Parents should be educated and then in turn they too educate their children on what is good and acceptable to do while exploring the cyber space and what is not.

### **Conclusion:**

India does not presently have laws to curb this evil. There are no serious punishments for cyber offenders. The recent most cyber laws are more focused on financial matters and terrorism. There even lies a lacuna in gathering, storing and producing electronic records in the court of law by authorities. *“the police department is producing IP addresses and call data records as the only electronic evidence. But here lies a huge loophole; hence police should combine old ways of investigations with the new ways, to make a water tight case”*, says Advocate Prashant Mali, cyber law and cyber security expert. The government must realise that India being a prominent IT hub, with a large section of society having access to internet, strong cyber laws are need of the hour.

There is no such legislature in our country but as we consider about the legal system, they should make it a legal duty for schools and colleges to have such policies and frame guidelines and mandate that bullying and cyber bullying is punishable. The Raghavan committee report has already recommended that teachers and principal be held liable for acts of bullying of students. So has the Supreme court in **university of Kerala VS. Council, Principal’s college, Kerala and Ors.** It is now a matter of implementation.

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