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Cyberbullying: An Overview of its prevalence in Saudi Arabia a literature review

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: 6 Feb 2023 Revised: 31 Feb 2023 Accepted: 18 March 2023 Published: 1 April 2023</p>	<p>The internet plays a significant role in modern society. It is undeniable that the internet has made education more accessible and ubiquitous than ever before. Despite the benefits of the online world to children, parents, and instructors, some are taking advantage of it evilly. The incidence of cyberbullying is on the rise across the globe. In recent years, cyberbullying has become increasingly popular in the media, and several high-profile suicides of adolescents have been linked to it. Our result demonstrated the prevalence of the issues and indicated that it is more searched by the public than traditional bullying. A comprehensive overview of cyberbullying is presented in this paper. The KSA government authorities must establish a minimum age for children to use online platforms and social media. Furthermore, schools and universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must develop and implement an online safety and protection policy that outlines the dangers and legal implications associated with cyberbullying, inappropriate Internet use, and the use of social media. Moreover, A continuous training program, awareness program, and social orientation program are also provided to parents and children, particularly concerning cyber safety and the risks associated with the internet.</p>
<p>Keywords: Cyberbullying, electronic devices, technology, prevalence, social support, and the impact of cyberbullying.</p> <p></p>	

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is a widespread problem that was nonexistent a decade ago in today's society. A cyberbully does not need to be physically strong to terrorize their victim; they only need a cell phone and a computer with internet connectivity. Teenagers increasingly have access to mobile media devices such as smartphones and tablets ¹. These devices allow them to remain in contact with their friends, record videos as they wish, and perform various other activities. However, multiple issues are generated by this technology; one of them is cyberbullying. Bullying, in general, is a global issue and causes severe consequences for some victims. The problem has been recognized widely in the last decades among many individuals and with various characteristics. As a simple explanation, bullying is an act of violence intended to harm someone physically, sexually, or psychologically to cause them to harm in some way.

In contrast, a cyberbully uses online communication technology to harm another intentionally and repeatedly (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Threatening, harassing, embarrassing, or socially excluding someone online is considered cyberbullying. Compared to traditional bullying, electronic devices complicate the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. The anonymity, social dissemination, and lack of supervision of electronic media, as well as more accessible access to the target, complicate their relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING

According to a study conducted in the United States, 64% of adolescents have cyberbullied others at least "once to twice" in the past 30 days (Bauman, 2012). In the UK, an investigation of 2218 secondary school students (11–19 years) revealed that 25% experienced cyberbullying (Mateu et al., 2020). The prevalence of cyberbullying in Canada ranges from 4.5 percent of university-aged youth to 33.7 percent of adolescents (Cunningham et al., 2015). In 2015, Vodafone Plc undertook a large-scale international study of 4,720 adolescents aged 13 to 18 in partnership with YouGov Plc. According to surveys, 26% of Irish adolescents have experienced cyberbullying, and 85% have heard of another person experiencing cyberbullying (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 2015, p. 7). A Russian study indicates that 22-31 percent of children (n=495) and adolescents (n=1272) report being bullied online (Kennedy & Zuch, 2011). Researchers observed that cyber victimization rates are high, with 45% of participants reporting being victimized (with no difference based on gender) (Olenik-Shemesh & Heiman, 2017). Multiple researchers have found that the prevalence of cyberbullying is epidemic. For instance, "Cyber-bullying is a growing epidemic in communities, including ours" (Chin, 2011), and "Child advocates say a growing epidemic of "cyberbullying" — the use of computers, cell phones, social networking sites, and other technology to threaten or humiliate others (Billitteri, 2013).

PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING IN SAUDI ARABIA

Enormous researchers around the globe have extensively researched cyberbullying, and it still requires more investigation in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There is a need to identify the factors that lead to the problem. In Saudi Arabia, where recent studies showed that 89.9% of the participants continuously accessed the internet, the issue's prevalence may be attributable to the internet's and technology's availability (A. Alhur, 2022). Furthermore, other studies showed similar results in the same study population (A. A. Alhur, 2021; A. Alhur & Alhur, 2022). However, limited studies have investigated this issue. For instance, a study indicated that 78.4% of kindergarten and elementary school children aged 5 to 8 from public and private schools in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia reported experiencing cyberbullying (Allehyani, 2018). Students in higher education in the KSA were concerned about cyberbullying on social media in 38.1% of cases (Alshehri & Lally, 2019). Another study of higher education students found that 20.7% had experienced cyberbullying (Qudah et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the prevalence of cyberbullying among Saudi online gamers was from 20.97% to 67% of the cursing patterns observed (AlJaffer et al., 2021). A recent study in KSA's higher education sector revealed that cyberbullying is a serious issue, with male students more likely than female students to engage in cyberbullying (Al-Zahrani, 2015). The results of an examination of 368 high school students on Saudi Arabia's north border for cyberbullying revealed a medium level of cyberbullying. Nevertheless, they were under psychological and emotional pressure (Aldhalaan, 2020). In a study of parents' perceptions regarding cyberbullying in schools, 763 out of 1249 parents identified cyberbullying as a significant problem (Alfakeh et al., 2021a). When were 205 Saudis asked how often do you think cyberbullying happens? 32% of respondents indicated it frequently occurs, particularly during the covid -19 (Alsaifi et al., 2019a).

Cyberbullying has been linked to suicide in several studies. For instance, A strong correlation exists between cyber victimization and depression and suicide attempts is strongly linked found by (Bauman et al., 2013). There is a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts among teens who have been victimized, according to (Lenhart et al., 2011). Every individual has the right to dignity. A person's right to feel safe and respected is stated in social work for social justice: Ten principles. This right is violated by cyberbullying (Brenden, 2007). Cyberbullying is prevalent worldwide, and serious efforts are being made to prevent it due to its dangers for some victims.

THE IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING

In researching the impact of cyberbullying worldwide, we observed that many individuals affected by it had been affected by it (Joav Merrick, 2018). The experiences on a social networking site indicated that 100% of participants reported an emotional impact. In this study, participants aged 15-17 were recruited from a secondary school in Melbourne (Dredge et al., 2014). Cyberbullying and psychosomatic difficulties have been linked in some studies. In 2013, a survey conducted by Kowalski and Limbe among American adolescents, it was found that those who were both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying experienced increased psychological concerns (depression, anxiety, and suicidal behavior) and physical health problems (insomnia, headaches, poor appetite) (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Ybarra et al. found that teenagers who were harassed online were more likely to consume alcohol and drugs and carry weapons at school (Ybarra et al., 2007). Additionally, it is crucial to remember that cyberbullying can adversely impact a person's ability to make friends (Peled, 2019). It can lead to detrimental emotional effects on victims and attackers as cyberbullying prevents them from interacting and communicating socially with the public (Peled, 2019). The consequence of cyberbullying is known to weaken the self-confidence of the bullied, with 97.5% agreeing. In comparison, 80% of the impact of cyberbullying on families, including family breakdowns, is significantly agreed by 80% (Alzamil, 2021).

CYBERBULLIES ISSUES

Multiple examinations were performed globally to understand the issues of cyber bullies. In a study, cyberbullying perpetrators exhibited lower self-esteem, self-efficacy, pro-social behavior, a sense of belonging, and school safety compared to those who did not engage in cyberbullying behavior (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In addition, adolescents who perpetrate cyberbullying experience negative emotions like embarrassment, sadness, frustration, fear, and anger (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011; Sourander et al., 2010). There is a poor relationship between their parents, delinquency, and substance abuse among them (Schenk et al., 2013). The cyberbully perpetrators exhibited lower self-esteem, self-efficacy, pro-social behavior, a sense of belonging, and school safety compared to those who did not engage in cyberbullying behavior (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In addition, adolescents who perpetrate cyberbullying experience negative emotions like embarrassment, sadness, frustration, fear, and anger (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011; Sourander et al., 2010). Moreover, researchers found that cyberbullies are less empathic toward victims than non-cyberbully individuals (Steffgen et al., 2011). According to the analysis, cyberbullying in the comments section was primarily conducted for fun (74%), for revenge/retaliation (9%), and for expressing upset feelings (5%) (Hamuddin et al., 2022).

COPING STRATEGIES

Individuals' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive reactions to stressful situations are all examples of coping methods (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The coping process helps the individual regulate their emotional response to a problem by neutralizing its negative character (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Researchers have categorized coping strategies and developed coping models based on these categories. The transactional and approach-avoidance models are the most common and well-known coping theories. The coping strategies are usually classified along problem-focused/emotion-focused axes based on these two theories (Roth & Cohen, 1986).

According to Schenk and Fremouw, cyberbullying victims use various coping strategies. As a result, their research found that cyberbully victims typically deal with cyber victimization by telling someone, avoiding friends or peers, retaliating, or withdrawing from social activities (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). The effects of cyberbullying can be mitigated or reduced through adolescents' coping strategies (Nixon, 2014). Furthermore, confronting online harassment effectively reduces its occurrence (Machackova et al., 2013). Developing an appropriate coping strategy is a necessity. Having adequate knowledge enhances the ability to cope effectively (AL-Shaqsi et al., 2022).

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The importance of social support for one's emotional and physical well-being cannot be overstated (K Holt & L Espelage, 2007). A previous study found that social support was a potent protective factor against the detrimental effects of cyberbullying (Machmutow et al., 2012). All parties involved in cyberbullying must receive individual treatment to combat this phenomenon effectively. Adolescents can be taught effective strategies for increasing self-control and empathy (Machmutow et al., 2012; Vazsonyi et al., 2012). Moreover, supportive families have been demonstrated to reduce the adverse outcomes of traditional bullying victimization (Bowes et al., 2010). Young people may be protected from bullying by maintaining contact and communication with their families during mealtimes (Elgar et al., 2014). Additionally, compared with peer support, positive coping styles, and secure attachments, family support was the strongest predictor of mental distress (Worsley et al., 2019). Furthermore, social support from family and teachers reduces the likelihood of depression and anxiety symptoms occurring (Hellfeldt et al., 2020). A previous study found that social support was a potent protective factor against the detrimental effects of cyberbullying (Machmutow et al., 2012). Researchers have concluded that average social skills, such as perceiving other people's feelings, communicating with them, and participating in their lives, reduce bullying behavior (Albantan, 2021).

SCHOOL COUNSELOR, TELEPSYCHOLOGY, AND TELEPSYCHIATRY SUPPORT

Globally, the number of teenagers suffering from psychopathological problems is increasing. Psychiatric disorders have been diagnosed more frequently in adolescents recently, raising many questions among authors (Frances & Batstra, 2013). Modern society is characterized by a highly competitive environment that can put adolescents under great stress. The solution to a social problem cannot be found by blaming social cues; in-depth analysis and effective intervention are necessary. Teenagers are increasingly prone to conduct issues and externalization disorders, such as prostitution, drug, and alcohol abuse, depression, and self-harm (Adams et al., 2013; Frances & Batstra, 2013; Fredlund et al., 2013; Maughan et al., 2014; Ulberg et al., 2012; Vitiello et al., 2009). Recently investigation conducted by Anas and Arwa Alhur in KSA demonstrated that only 108 of 443 (24.3%) claimed that they do not have any psychological or behavioral problems. Cyberbullying may contribute to the prevalence of mental disorders.

An important symptom of internet addiction, cybersex, addiction to substances, or alcohol abuse is sleep loss, which can adversely affect social relationships, conduct disorders, anxiety disorders, or major depression (Clarke & Harvey, 2012). Nevertheless, many solutions can execute to prevent or minimize such discords. For instance,

school counselors counsel students with complex needs, such as depression, suicidal ideation, pregnancy, substance abuse, school violence, and child maltreatment (Page et al., 2001). The school counselor should assist students in all areas of their academic, career, and personal-social development; these focus domains are closely linked to their educational goals. They help students make critical educational and career decisions and address many mental health issues that negatively impact their academic performance. A school counselor can play an essential role as a leader within their community and a team player and collaborator. Counselors and teachers must establish effective partnerships to enhance student’s learning and achievement (Sink, 2008). Effective counselors at all educational levels are necessary to assist students with resolving any issues they may encounter. Psychologists and counselors can effectively address cyberbullying. All professionals should consider confidentiality and privacy, especially in sensitive situations. Video therapy is one solution, and it is being utilized in many countries to assist those with mental health issues (Poh Li et al., 2013). Telepsychology effectively treats anxiety and depression; for instance, patients with cognitive behavioral therapy receive six to eight sessions online weekly (Poletti et al., 2021). A significant advantage of telepsychology is its ability to reach geographically remote patients (Gordon et al., 2015). However, the acceptance of such services has been largely overlooked in previous studies.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers reviewed the literature of published papers nationally and focused on the prevalence of cyberbullying in Saudi Arabia. The following search engines and databases were used to find information about Saudi Arabia’s cyberbullying and related terms: PubMed, Google Scholar, Cochrane Library, Current Contents, EBSCO, Directory of Open Access Journals, and Science Open. However, our investigations did not find national surveys or statistics regarding cyberbullying in Saudi Arabia. Thus, we used the google trends tool to compare the interest of the Saudi population in cyberbullying during the last year; figure 1 shows the comparison between cyberbullying and school bullying.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The graph below illustrates that people in KSA searched for online bullying significantly higher than school bullying. This graph indicates the prevalence of this issue in Saudi Arabia.

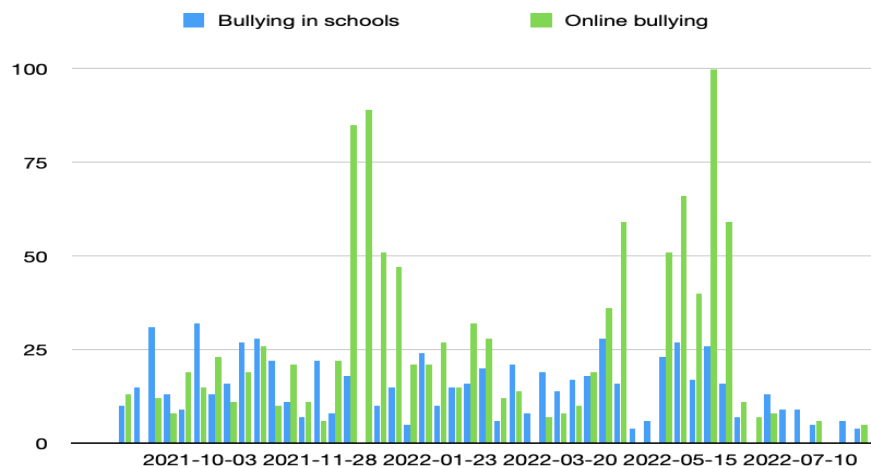


Figure 1. Google Trends comparison between terms ‘bullying in schools’ and ‘online bullying.’

The second graph shows that individuals are searched for (in Arabic) online bullying more frequently than bullying in schools. The researchers expect results as cyberbullying is highly prevalent among the

public nowadays. This may be due to the pandemic as recent investigations aimed to compare the cyberbullying majority before and after the pandemic, and their funding inducted that there were significant increases in cyberbullying attitudes and cyberbullying perpetration (Barlett et al., 2021)

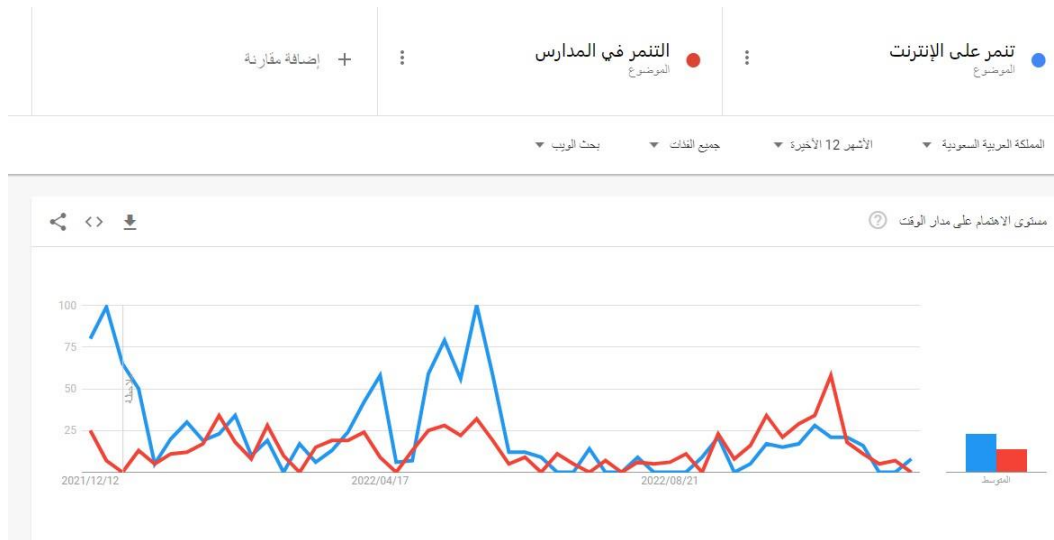


Figure 2. Google Trends comparison between terms ‘bullying in schools’ and ‘online bullying’ in Arabic.

Researchers conducted a unique study that provided insight into cyberbullying among typical and ADHD students. Students with no ADHD disorder agreed with 24.3% when asked if they use social media to harm others, while students with ADHD responded with 93.9% (Abdelrazek & Eltantawy, 2020). A study by a group of researchers found that 1135 tweets out of 5109 were bullying tweets in KSA (Almutairi & Al-Hagery, 2021). On the other hand, in KSA, 90.5% of 10th and 12th graders were not victims of cyberbullying, and 94.2% were not bullied (Hammad & Awed, 2020). In a recent investigation in the country, 66 percent of parents strongly believe that cyberbullying is detrimental to children's mental health in a recent analysis in the country. Furthermore, 78% of parents reported monitoring their children's Internet usage was crucial (Alfakeh et al., 2021b). According to a recent study conducted in this country, several factors directly and significantly influence behavioral intentions toward cyberbullying. These factors include attitudes, social norms, perceived behavioral control, social media use, and parental control (Alotaibi, 2019). However, in KSA, a study indicated that as a result of the question, "Have you ever been cyberbullied?" 77.1 % of the respondents responded that they had never been cyberbullied (Alsaahfi et al., 2019b). Therefore, the public needs to be aware of bullying and cyberbullying to provide accurate responses. The graph below illustrates that people in KSA searched for online bullying significantly higher than school bullying. Enormous researchers around the globe have broadly researched cyberbullying, and it still requires more investigation in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

CYBERBULLYING RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The findings from the present study show that cyberbullying has become a problem not only in the Western world but also in the Middle East, mainly in Saudi Arabia. Results indicate that cyberbullying is becoming more prevalent than traditional bullying in search engines in the Saudi population, consistent with other recent findings.

According to the study, approximately 20% of the participants spend more than 12 hours a day online, and cyberbullying prevalence was 42.8% overall, with a slight male preference². Also, Cyberbullying is more likely to occur among middle and high school students who engage in traditional bullying as perpetrators³. Furthermore, researchers found that Low levels of empathy, self-control, self-esteem, thrill-seeking behavior, impulsivity, sadism, narcissism, psychopathy, and a lack of moral compass influence cyberbullying⁴.

There have been several studies that have identified peer influences. The prevalence of cyberbullying among peers increases a cyberbullies likelihood of committing cyberbullying⁵. However, positive peer influence and peer support effectively prevent cyberbullying⁶. Cyberbullying perpetration is also significantly predicted by a lack of teacher support and clear school rules regarding cyberbullying⁷. In contrast, schools with positive climates and students who are satisfied with their school are less likely to engage in cyberbullying⁸. Based on the study conducted in 2020, emotional competency either acts as a risk factor or a protective factor against cyberbullying. Researchers found that cyberbullies have low self-awareness, possibly related to low emotional awareness⁹.

Moreover, an investigation indicated that poor emotional competence was associated with risky and deviant behaviors¹⁰. A study found that childhood maltreatment victims were involved in a 'cycle of violence' and were more likely to bully others as they grew up¹¹. Children's disclosures to their parents and their sense of humor can act as protective factors against cyberbullying. Also, a study in 2017 shows that cyberbullying perpetration and victimization are significantly correlated with offensive and avoidant parent-child communication¹². Undoubtedly, the cyberbullying issue must not be underestimated, and researchers should deeply examine many factors associated with cyberbullying.

CYBERBULLYING IMPACT

Similarly, to traditional bullying, cyberbullying can negatively impact a victim's physical and mental health and academic performance¹³. Moreover, cyberbullying can negatively affect the mental health of victims, leading to depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional difficulties¹⁴. Studies have found that cyberbullying results in increased absenteeism and poor academic performance among students as a consequence of cyberbullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2017). Despite the similarities between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, cyberbullying may be more harmful to victims (Vaillancourt et al., 2017). According to a study among youth, most participants experienced cyberbullying and psychological distress symptoms during the lockdowns (covid-19 spread)¹⁵. A group of researchers demonstrated cyberbullying and mental health problems¹⁶.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All stakeholders must take action to combat cyberbullying, including parents, adolescents, children, school authorities, and other individuals in positions of responsibility and influence. In recent years, cyberbullying has become increasingly popular in the media, and several high-profile suicides of adolescents have been linked to it worldwide. Our result demonstrated the prevalence of the issues and indicated that it is more searched by the public than traditional bullying. A comprehensive overview of cyberbullying is presented in this paper. Cyberbullying prevention or elimination can be achieved through several methods, such as education and public intervention. Children, teenagers, and parents must be aware of cyberbullying, its consequences, and who will most likely be victimized. It is possible to prevent cyberbullying despite its immorality. Parents, teachers, and politicians must always take appropriate measures to prevent cyberbullying among the younger generation in schools and communities. The Internet can be used positively and unite people to stop cyberbullying.

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