

**Impacts of Social Media Usage on Cyberbullying: Examining the Consequences and Mitigation Strategies; A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Youth in District Dir Lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

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**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.358>**

**Abstract**

The current study was conducted on the impacts of social media usage on cyberbullying among youth in districts lower Dir Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A sample size of 354 students was randomly selected for the collection of primary data by using structured questionnaires. The primary data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distribution) and inferential statistics, specifically the chi-square test. The present study found that the proliferation of the use of smartphones and the rising level of the usage of social media has transformed the practice of bullying at micro and macro levels. Children, teens, and youth of poor families become the victims of bullying more than those who have high income to encounter such kind of online bullying. Furthermore, cyberbullying is the most popular online crime on social media. Likewise, the majority of cyberbullies send explicit images to users they did not ask for and spread false rumors about social media users. Similarly, some common questions asked by someone other than your parents like where you were, who they are, with whom you were, and what you were doing, also come under the domain of cyberbullying. Similarly, the majority of social media users become victims of offensive names and have been threatened by someone through online social websites. Cyberbullying deteriorates well-being physically, socially, and psychologically. Cyberbullying is also vulnerable and threatens the social and economic stability of social media users.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, Social Media, Victims, Dir Lower.

**Introduction**

In the past few decades, cyberbullying has become a significant issue, affecting children and youth across various countries. A researcher sheds light on this problem by interviewing parents about their children's experiences with cyberbullying. According to the study, a huge number of children and youth are affected by cyberbullying indicates a trend that is worsening over time (Cook, 2020).

One of the main challenges of cyberbullying is its ability to rapidly spread to a large audience and remain visible for extended periods. As a modern issue, cyberbullying often leads to serious consequences for victims, affecting both their mental and physical health. Schneider et al. explored the connection between victimization and five types of psychological distress using data from the metro west adolescent health survey, which included over 20,000 students. The study found that depressive symptoms (34%) and self-injury (24%) were most prevalent among victims of cyberbullying. Unfortunately, many incidents are not reported to authorities for appropriate action (Schneider et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying involves using digital tools like email, cellphone, gaming and social media to threaten, harass, embarrass, or exclude others. It has rapidly emerged as a significant global public health issue. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying offers anonymity to perpetrators, reaches a vast audience, follows victims everywhere, and often lacks a full awareness of the impacts on victims (Hinduja S & Patchin JW, 2009). The global google searches for cyberbullying drop significantly during summer and winter breaks, suggesting higher cyberbullying activity during the school years. A notable decline in searches occurred in the fall of 2020, likely due to COVID-19 disruptions and the shift to E-Learning. However, search trends have since returned to normal, indicating a consistent level of interest in cyberbullying over the past decade (Cyberbullying Statistics and Facts for 2022 & Maurya, 2020). Parental strategies for children, teens, and youth for the use of smartphones is to limit their time spent on mobile phones, while this perception of parents may bypass this approach and reflect parenting efforts that can protect and detect children and youth from harmful engagement, whether on the spot or isolated (Dishion et al., 2004).

The global digital report 2019 indicates that there are 3.484 billion worldwide social media users, with this growing numbers at a rate of 9% per year. Social media usage now spans all segments of society, including students. It has an increasing role in education, particularly in fostering collaboration among students. This trend highlights social media's potential to enhance knowledge-sharing and learning opportunities (Mantymaki & Riemer, 2016). The accessibility of technological media contrasts with the social interactions that occur in the physical world, which typically require face-to-face engagement. Digital online social media platforms operate exclusively through the internet (Boase & Wellman, 2006). Due to the lack of parental focus youth and teens are using social media are more likely to practice increased harassment, psychological distress, physical threats, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, education failures, violence, victimization, and much more deviant behaviors (Ybarra et al., 2006/2007; Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; van Geel et al., 2014).

Moreover, profoundly the use of social media affects young people socially, emotionally, physically, and psychologically as well as during crucial periods of cognitive development. Youth are often utilizing these online platforms to quickly gain popularity, fame, and status by posting information, funny videos, or other related thing on their profile, sending or receiving media, chatting, and sharing information with unknown users (Roberts & Dunbar, 2011). Furthermore, numerous studies have investigated deviant behavior associated with using various social media sites, by finding indicating that a significant number of people, especially teens, and youth who are using these platforms may engage in activities such as cyberbullying, harassment, blackmailing, language abuse, gambling, depression, mental health issue, cyber deception, alcoholic abuse, and other crimes. These deviant behaviors enable youth to access and victimize others through social media (Agustina, 2015; Awan, 2016; Barlett & Helmstetter, 2018; Habiba et al., 2018).

## **Result and discussion**

### ***Descriptive statistics explanation***

Table 1 revealed several key findings regarding social media usage and its impacts. The majority of respondents (88.7%) use social media and a significant portion believe that excessive use leads to deviant behavior both at macro and micro levels (70.1%) and contributes to psychological and social disorders (68.6%). When it comes to academic performance, 68.6% of respondents feel that media addiction negatively affects students' performance, with 74.3% noting weaknesses in both formal and informal learning environments due to excessive social media use. Additionally, 75.4% agree that social media adversely affects students' social behavior in daily life. The findings indicate a prevalent concern about the negative impacts of social media usage on behavior and academic performance. Most respondents perceive excessive social media use as a significant factor contributing to deviant behavior, psychological and social disorders, and poor academic outcomes. There is a notable concern about the role of social media in fostering substance abuse and juvenile delinquency, with particular emphasis on the detrimental impact of both parent and teacher social media habits. This observation is linked to the statement of Nain (2014), who also reported that excessive usage of social media negatively affects youth behavior and academic performance. However, there is some divergence regarding the consequences of online victimization. These findings show less agreement on the harmful effects compared to previous research, suggesting that the perception of online harassment may vary based on local contexts or personal experiences. In this study, a majority of respondents (52.5) percent do not believe that online victimization leads to social dysfunction, which contrasts with findings from Jose et al. (2012) and yabarra et al. (2007) which highlight significant negative consequences associated with online harassment. Similarly, (58.8) percent of the respondents agree that excessive usage of social media may lead to substance abuse and (66.4) percent attribute juvenile delinquency to excessive usage of social media by both parents and teachers. This suggests that the behavior of adults in the social media environment may also negatively affect youth development and academic performance, supporting Hirschi's (2001) assertion that parental and teacher involvement in social media can detract from their socializing duties. Overall, these results underline the need for strategies to mitigate the negative effects of social media, including increased awareness and balanced usage among both youth and adults, and enhanced guidance from educators and parents.

### **Association between cyberbullying and Deviant Behavior**

The table 2 demonstrates the relationship between dependent variable (deviant behavior) and independent variable (cyberbullying). The study found a non-significant association ( $P = 0.904$ ) with the statement that proliferation of smartphones and the excessive usage of social media among youth and teens have transformed bullying practices at micro and macro level. Conversely a significant association ( $P = 0.001$ ) was found with the statement that teens from lower income families are bullied and practiced than those from higher-income families to encounter such kind of online bullying. Additionally, a non-significant association ( $P = 0.906$ ) was found with the statement that cyberbullying is the most popular and common online digital crime on social media, as noted by Habiba et al. (2018). According to the table the next statement stated that regarding the receipt of unsolicited explicit images, also showed a non-significant association ( $P = 0.504$ ), which contrast with the views of Ajayi (2006) and Adebule (2012). However, a significant association ( $P = 0.004$ ) was found with the statement that a person can spread false rumors about you, differing from the findings of Gerrard et al. (2008). A non-significant association ( $P = 0.444$ ) was found for the statement that questions about one's whereabouts, companions, or activities from someone other than your parents constitute cyberbullying, this statement was supported by Dishion et al. (2004). Moreover, the statement highlights that regarding being called offensive

names or physically threatened through online websites also showed a non-significant association ( $P=0.173$ ). This finding aligns with the study of Ybarra et al. (2006/2007), Bonanno and Schneider, and Hymel (2013), as well as van Geel et al. (2014). A significant association ( $P = 0.014$ ) was found with the statement that cyberbullying deteriorates the physical, social and psychological well-being of a person. Similarly, a significant association ( $P = 0.001$ ) was found with the statement that cyberbullying poses a threat to the economic and social stability of individuals, particularly teenagers and youth. Roberts also carried out the same statement and Dunbar, (2011) that the use of social media site can badly affect our youth socially, physically, emotionally and economically which is quickly occurs a big status, fame and prestige in daily social life through social media.

### **Conclusion**

The proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media have fundamentally transformed the landscape of bullying, at both macro and micro levels. This transformation is particularly evident among teens, where various forms of online bullying compared to their higher-income counterparts disproportionately affect those from lower-income families. Cyberbullying has emerged as the most prevalent form of online crime, manifesting in several ways: unsolicited explicit images, the spread of false rumors, intrusive questions about personal activities, and offensive or threatening messages. The impact of cyberbullying extends beyond immediate emotional distress. Cyberbullying significantly deteriorates the physical, social and physiological well-being of victims, posing a threat to their economic and social stability. The excessive usage of social media has amplified the incidence and impact of cyberbullying, transforming platforms meant for connection into breeding grounds for deviant behavior. Teens and youth are particularly vulnerable, facing various forms of cyberbullying, including unsolicited explicit images, false rumors, intrusive questioning and offensive or threatening messages. Given the severe consequences, it is imperative for government authorities to take decisive action to detect, prevent and address cyberbullying. This includes implementing robust policies, providing support systems for victims, and promoting awareness and education about the dangers and signs of cyberbullying. Some specific measures should involve such policies implementation which enacting and enforcing stringent laws specifically targeting cyberbullying to deter potential offenders. Likewise promoting educational programs that raise awareness about signs and consequences of bullying and teaching digital citizenship and empathy. Establishing accessible support system for victims, including counseling services and helplines are also very important to detect cyberbullying. Encouraging or mandating social media platforms to develop and implement advanced detection algorithms and reposting mechanisms to promptly identify and address cyberbullying incidents. By taking these comprehensive actions, governments can mitigate the negative impacts of social media usage on cyberbullying and create a safer online environment for all individuals, especially vulnerable teens and youth.

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**Table 1: Perception of the Respondents Regarding Dependent variable (Deviant Behavior)**

| <b>Statement</b>                                                                                 | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Are you using any social media sites?                                                            | 314(88.7)    | 40(11.3)        | 354(100)     |
| Excessive usage of social media provoked to deviant behavior at macro and micro level.           | 248(70.1)    | 106(29.9)       | 354(100)     |
| Deviant behavior on social media creates a psychological and social disorder.                    | 225(63.6)    | 129(36.4)       | 354(100)     |
| Media addiction due to excessive usage of social media drastically affects academic performance. | 243(68.6)    | 111(31.4)       | 354(100)     |

|                                                                                                                          |           |           |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Academic performance is weak due to excessive usage of social media sites at formal and informal learning setup.         | 263(74.3) | 91(25.7)  | 354(100) |
| Do you agree that social media usage had negative effects on student's social behavior in daily life?                    | 267(75.4) | 87(24.6)  | 354(100) |
| Are you become a victim of any online harassment, which led to socio-psychological dys-functionalism?                    | 168(47.5) | 186(52.5) | 354(100) |
| Do you agree that excessive social media often lead toward inclination of drugs and others substance abuse in your area? | 207(58.5) | 147(41.5) | 354(100) |
| Juvenile delinquency is cause due to excessive usage of social media by parents & teachers.                              | 235(66.4) | 119(33.6) | 354(100) |

**Table 2: Association between independent variable (Cyber Bullying) with dependent variable (deviant behavior among youth)**

| Statement                                                                                                                                               | Dependent variable           | Chi-square & P value         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| The proliferation of smart phones and the rise of social media have transformed the bullying practice at macro and micro level.                         | Deviant Behavior among youth | $\chi^2 = .021$ P= (0.904)   |
| Teens from lower income families are more likely than, those from higher income families to encounter certain form of online bullying.                  |                              | $\chi^2 = 12.377$ P= (0.001) |
| Cyber bullying is the most popular online crime on social media.                                                                                        |                              | $\chi^2 = .024$ P= (0.906)   |
| Had someone send you explicit images you did not ask for?                                                                                               |                              | $\chi^2 = .601$ P= (0.504)   |
| Had someone spread false rumors about you?                                                                                                              |                              | $\chi^2 = 8.666$ P= (0.004)  |
| Asking questions i.e. where you were, with whom you were or what you were doing, by someone other than parents come under the domain of cyber bullying. |                              | $\chi^2 = .617$ P= (0.444)   |
| Have you victims of any offensive names or physically threatened by someone through online websites.                                                    |                              | $\chi^2 = 2.012$ P= (0.173)  |
| Cyber bullying deteriorates the physical, social and psychological well-being of a person.                                                              |                              | $\chi^2 = 6.62$ P= (0.014)   |
| Cyber bullying is a threat to economic and social stability of a person/teenager.                                                                       |                              | $\chi^2 = 11.392$ P= (0.001) |

**Source:** (Survey September 2021) values in the table present frequency while the parenthesis represents the percentage (% age) of the respondents