CYBERBULLYING AMONG STUDENTS IN INDIA

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In the digital age where technology has made life a lot easier, on the downside, too much of dependence on it has had a negative impact on the life of users, especially students. According to a Statista report, 15% of Indian parents complained of their kids spending six hours online every day.

Adolescents in particular are more vulnerable to cyberbullying. Due to their need to fit-in with a certain group of students in schools and colleges or be popular, they often end-up posting videos and photographs on social media just for some likes and comments. However, this takes an ugly turn when such content gets leaked or morphed. This is where cyberbullies take advantage and blackmail such kids only to extort money.

A cohort study in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh showed that adolescent victims of cyberbullying had an increased risk of depressive symptoms, with a higher prevalence of suicide ideation in females (7.5%) compared with males (2.3%).

SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION TRAPPING STUDENTS

We live in a digital age of Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, not to mention dating apps, that keep us glued to the screen throughout the day. Students particularly, spend way too much time doomscrolling, playing games online and even watching porn. This not only affects their attention span but also their academic performance.

In a study conducted by National Center for Biotechnology Information, it was learnt that 30% of 1721 students pursuing higher education experienced cyberbullying and 26.3% reported adverse effects of cyberbullying on their academic performance.

Moreover, kids easily get attracted to a certain kind of lifestyle showcased by influencers on social media and try to copy them without realising the off-camera reality of the glitz and glam they present for money. Furthermore, gaining half knowledge based on a 15-second reel and making political or religious views based on that leads to trolling that severely impacts the mental status of kids who often even indulge with the trolls just to win an argument but end up getting bullied and abused online.

A 2022 report by McAfee Corp

Impact of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment on Youth
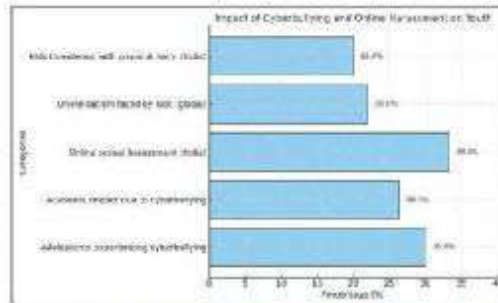
called Cyberbullying in Plain Sight suggests that 22% of kids as young as 10 years old face online racism all across the globe, with younger children more on target in countries like India, Mexico and the UK. Moreover, one in three kids in India face online sexual harassment and one in five kids receive threat of physical harm online.

Speaking of dating apps, teens, especially girls often fall prey to swindlers pretending to be a potential match only to use them for monetary or sexual benefits. There are even cases of jilted lovers in schools and colleges who threaten to leak private pictures of their ex-lovers after break-up only to tarnish their image. Another addiction trapping kids is of online gambling. In a recent incident, a college student allegedly killed himself after losing money to online gambling.

FEAR OF VICTIM-SHAMING PUSHING STUDENTS TOWARDS SUICIDE

Unfortunately, we live in a society where even today many lives are lost in the name of honour. Lack of understanding from parents, hesitation in seeking help and fear of harassment by the authorities and the society, are some of the many reasons why victims of cyberbullying prefer to end their life instead of approaching the law.

Earlier in June this year, an 18-year-old social media influencer from Kerala committed suicide after being subjected to cyberbullying by her ex-boyfriend following their breakup. In another case in the same month, a 20-year-old student from Bengaluru was found dead in her hostel room after she allegedly lost money in cyberfraud. In Jan this year, a 15-year-old boy from HYPERLINK "https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/sextortion-3-held-for-abetting-teens-suicide/articleshow/107159187.cms"Ahmedabad committed suicide after being blackmailed with his obscene video. Last year, a 16-year-old boy HYPERLINK "https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/etimes/trending/tragic-death-of-ujjain-teen-priyanshu-yadav-due-to-online-

bullying/articleshow/105511796.cms"from Ujjain committed suicide after being bullied online for wearing makeup. These are just a few examples that show the ugly side of technology and how it can take a fatal turn.

LAWS AGAINST CYBERBULLYING AND WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE

India has several laws to tackle cybercrime such as the Information & Technology (IT) Act 2000, Section 67 for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form and 66C for identity theft. There is also Pocso Act to tackle crime against minors, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) section 356 for defamation and 111 for cybercrime.

However, the real question is how strict is our judicial system in ensuring justice to the victims of such crime. Harassment by cops is not an unknown fact in our country. While getting a lawyer is another task, even if one manages to file a case, the speed with which the judiciary works and the expense involved amid delay in trial leaves the victim with no other option but to suffer and eventually give up.

It's crucial to address the stigma around such cases which stops victims from coming forward and filing the complaint. Making people understand that it's the criminal who needs to be punished and not the victim

can help them fight the fear factor. A parent should be the first person a kid turns to if they are being bullied online. However, in India most kids don't share that kind of rapport with their parents. Strict, unavailable, abusive parenting often pushes them away and makes them more inclined towards social media to earn their daily dose of validation. And, later if things turn ugly, many prefer to take the extreme step rather than face their parents.

In today's day and age, not only is it important to create awareness about cyberbullying at an early age but it is also crucial to ensure that you are available for your kid, are keen on listening to them, and have created a comfortable space such that they don't hesitate in sharing their problems with you.

One on one conversation, empathy, psychological aid are a few of the services that legal firms and NGOs can offer to the victims, which can help them open up freely about their case. Moreover, fastracking of such cases can save the victim time and money. Furthermore, awareness about cybercrime and helpline numbers, and how one can save themselves from falling prey to cyberbullies, can help reduce such cases and young lives lost to nothing.

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