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Secondary Level Students' Experiences of Cyberbullying through Facebook

Betendra Kumar Dahal

Abstract

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Corresponding Author:

Betendra Kumar Dahal

Email: betendra49@gmail.com

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ICT users face various challenges due to the lack of knowledge and awareness to use its tools properly. Along with the spread of Facebook users, the trend of cyberbullying is gradually increasing among teenagers including school students who have been victimised daily. This study explores the students' experiences of cyberbullying through Facebook and the strategies they apply to cope with cyberbullying. I employed the qualitative research method in which the semi-structured interview was designed to collect data from 16 participants. The finding of this study depicts that cyberbullying is experienced by the participants in various ways like sharing memes on Facebook wall and Messenger, using nicknames, using unacceptable (vulgar) words, teasing, threatening, hacking Facebook passwords, and using, proposing for being close friends and joining photos and uploading, sending messages time and again and calling during night time. The study also found that cyberbullying makes victimised people feel insecure. It was also suggested to report with the family members and friends making strict laws, keeping in school level curriculum and launching mass awareness to cope with the cyberbullying activities found in the school level students of Nepal.

Keywords: Digital devices, cyberbullying, Facebook, online harassment, social media.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) advancement has increased the use of digital devices, making more students turn tech-friendly in recent years. However, internet access has also increased the probability of cyberbullying worldwide (Tsimtsiou et al., 2018). Cyberbullying, a form of bullying behaviour, occurs through the use of multiple ICT platforms with a deliberate intention to repeatedly harm others (Baas et al., 2013; Li, 2007). Cyberbullying entails posting or conveying threatening or embarrassing messages through different digital technologies such as cellular phones, websites, e-mails, and video cameras to trouble others (Ybarra, 2004). Online addiction has exposed the youths to practice such behaviours simply by posting nasty comments, spreading false rumours, circulating vulgar pictures, making threatening comments and making erotic incitement in the lack of proper supervision and guidance (Chang et al., 2015). More to it, the popularity of social media among youngsters has made it a convenient platform to practice online harassment due to the easy leverage one gets to other's personal information (Garett et al., 2016). So, the growing use of the internet including different applications and electronic gadgets has gradually increased such harassing behaviours, which remain a serious health problem, particularly among school children (Aboujaoude et al., 2015).

Unlike physical bullying occurring in the school premises, cyberbullying can take place anywhere and at any time making the consequences much more intense and horrifying particularly for school goers (Notar et al., 2013). Cyberbullying creates severe mental health risks including depression, anxiety, fear, a sense of alienation and powerlessness, somatic symptoms, and suicidal ideation (Field, 2018; Kumar & Goldstein, 2020; Nixon, 2014). It also results in low concentration in studies forcing students to remain absent from the classes ultimately resulting in their poor performances (Beran & Li, 2007). Similarly, it also creates the situation of self-harm phenomenon among the victimized persons (Nguyen et al., 2020) who are closer to the technologies. Sexting, messaging, commenting, making phone calls and disseminating private photos to threaten others create severe anxiety issues in the victims making them feel socially, mentally and academically embarrassed ultimately hindering their progress with a lasting impact upon themselves (Kanwal & Jami, 2019).

Students, while using social media like Facebook, start bullying with its multiple ways to others by teasing, chatting with vulgar words, commenting on statuses, and uploading prank photos and videos (Kanwal & Jami, 2019). The students engaged in cyberbullying and share unnecessary messages, repeatedly insult the bullied ones and transmit unusual propaganda regarding an individual which directly impacts the victimized people as they get (Betts, 2016; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Willard, 2007; Windisch et al., 2022). Whatever and whenever they need to benefit from innocent colleagues, they start convincing others to disclose their secrecy otherwise they threaten to exclude others from their group which will negatively affect the persons who cannot go against them (Willard, 2007). As a whole, cyberbullying leads the innocent students being threatened and embarrassed. Along with getting a platform for learning, students are involved in using Facebook mostly reducing time for classes which misleads them to start bullying.

In terms of cyberbullying, Facebook is one of the most common and most used social media (McCarthy, 2021) and it was due to the extreme use of Facebook and other social media and online portals mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the students from urban areas were ensured online classes and the students from rural areas were assigned weekly, and monthly assignments (Dawadi et al., 2020) and other ways of making up their education in the context of Nepal. The online class pattern obliged the students of urban areas and rural areas where the internet facility was available to create their Facebook ID where some of them used their parents'/guardians' Facebook to get school notices and information. During that time, Facebook was taken as one of the most effective and easiest means of communication (Giri, 2020) as it employs messenger chatting facilities as well. It was also taken as a medium to connect online classes and to notify rigorously.

Regarding lessening the unusual activities performance, users have to be aware of the crime which can be led by cyberbullying. Similarly, parents and educators are responsible (Kaluvarachchi et al., 2020) for reducing cyberbullying focusing on exposure to the use of technology as an excellent platform for shaping the future. There are approximately 13 million Facebook users in Nepal (Digital 2022: Nepal, 2022). It has been used as a better means of communication and helps to deliver and know the information easily in its network so, it is also important to reduce awkward usage of Facebook and should be used as an effective social media for making communicative tool and learning gateway to the students.

Facebook has become a common social network for sharing notices, messages, memos and other necessary information. However, it is discouraging the people, particularly the school students who are being bullied (Pyżalski et al., 2022). Therefore, I want to dig up the answers to these questions which have thrilled me time and again: How do secondary-level students experience cyberbullying through Facebook? What are the strategies they apply to cope with cyberbullying?

Along with the spread of Facebook users, cyberbullying is also committed through it and the school students have been victimized of it day by day. Moreover, very few studies have been carried out regarding students' experiences with cyberbullying in the context of Nepal. So, I want to explore the students' experiences of cyberbullying through Facebook along with the strategies they apply to cope with cyberbullying in the context of Nepal, in particular.

Literature Review

This section presents some related literature based on the research questions in two themes.

Students' Experience of Cyberbullying through Facebook

Cyberbullying mainly occurs on websites and in social media using the internet, cell phones, laptops, computers and so on and is prevalent all over the world; and, the ways of bullying is varied according to the nature of the technology (Li, 2006). Li (2006) found that most of the females were more suppressed than the males in terms of sharing their victimized situation. Similarly, Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016) mentioned social media as attractive platforms for cyberbullying that create disputes and misunderstanding and there is a high possibility of being afraid of missing the friends among the students. Moreover, Facebook is one of the cyberbullying offences (Gahagan et al., 2016) among social media platforms.

Victims of cyberbullying also prefer to practice with others to get rid of suppression, and self-satisfaction, reducing anxiety; develop a panel of friendships creating hostility with another group; and be involved in awkward activities finally, the victims can also be bullies (Baas et al., 2013). Moreover, cyberbullying develops aggression among the victims as they also react aggressively to other frustrating conditions (Völlink et al., 2013).

Bharati et al. (2021) reported that cyberbullying was experienced by 34.7% of the participants among 213 nursing students and the participants faced academic (61.5%), psychological (57.7%) and social problems because of cyberbullying. Akrim and Sulasmi (2022) found that most the students repeatedly send unnecessary messages on social media because of rival thought, frustration and preference to trouble others. They also revealed that students, sometimes, bully their teachers as well along with their mates. Rajbhandari and Rana (2022) examined the teachers' experience of being bullied by the students. They explored that the students repeatedly used to abuse and insult the teachers through social media which made the teachers feel insecure and harassed from such activities.

Strategies to Cope with Cyberbullying through Facebook

Alipan et al. (2021) suggested some cyber-specific technological solutions to cyberbullying activities by changing the account or keeping details privacy, removing account permanently or temporarily as per the need, restricting friends or follower, staying offline and reporting the issue immediately. However, Parris et al. (2012) stated that the students who are bullied do not report about cyberbullying due to disbelief in others to be helped, so they should have supportive environments, knowledge about cyberbullying resources and open discussions to build confidence in them.

Orel et al. (2017) suggested blocking, staying away from cyberbullying happening place, and asking help from friends to get rid of cyberbullying victimization. Similarly, Selwyn and Aagaard (2021) discussed on being away from technology, particularly mobile phones can control cyberbullying. However, it may not be the permanent solution in this era because banning on advance technology can create complexity. So, it is also important to aware and arm the parents along with teachers and friends about the knowledge and skills in eradicating bullying involvement (Chen & Zhu, 2022; Ozansoy et al., 2018).

School is a source of knowledge transformation. So it should lead to plan, develop and implement policies, and technology, involve students to control cyberbullying (Cross et al., 2012). Along

with school, Cassidy et al. (2013) claimed that home culture, modelling, curriculum development and ICT-based curriculum help students to support lessening cyberbullying, making them empower to reduce cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is not only in the students but also in other people who are rigorously involved in online workplaces. Similarly, Koirala (2020) reported that 67% of female journalists experienced online abuse and they discarded using social media platforms to be protected from it. She also suggested making effective implementation of anti-harassment actions from legislation, media organizations and feminists collectively.

The use of technology and social media platforms are being used excessively. Various studies have been carried out examining the experiences, impacts and coping strategies of cyberbullying and most of the studies are concerned with university level students in various contexts. Most of the studies suggest various ways of being free from cyberbullying. However, the suggestions and strategies made from the previous research seem unable to settle the cyberbullying through Facebook. There is little literature found in the context of Nepal regarding the issue of cyberbullying and fewer studies have been conducted to explore school-level students' experience with cyberbullying through Facebook.

Methodology

This study is an analysis of students' experience of cyberbullying through Facebook. I employed an interpretive phenomenology design as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2007) under the interpretive qualitative method to explore students' lived experiences regarding cyberbullying. After getting consent from the schools and participants, I visited different schools and collected data. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants maintaining all the ethical norms ensuring them confidentiality of the data and the identity of the participants. The interviews were recorded on mobile devices.

Participants

I identified the schools in which most of the students used Facebook to interact with their friends, relatives and used for various purposes. I visited 4 different school head teachers and contact the students. I employed purposive sampling technique to select the schools and participants to get rich information for the study. With the help of the head teachers, I contacted the selected students and developed a good rapport with them so as to make convenient to interview with them. Based on the consent and availability, as the study focused on the secondary level students, I selected 2 girls and 2 boys from each school representing grade nine and ten to make gender equality. Then, I replaced the students' and schools' original names with pseudonyms for high confidentiality regarding participants' identities.

Table 1

Participants' Details with Pseudonyms

SN	School	Participants	Class	Gender
01	Adarsha School	Bhabishya	10	Male
02	"	Pabitra	10	Female
03	"	Shekhar	9	Male
04	"	Mamata	9	Female
05	Advance School	Birendra	10	Male
06	"	Nabin	9	Male
07	"	Rekha	10	Female
08	"	Smriti	9	Female
09	Public Academy	Prajina	9	Female
10	"	Sandesh	10	Male
11	"	Divas	9	Male
12	"	Sandhya	10	Female
13	Janajyoti School	Dikendra	10	Male
14	"	Rohit	9	Male
15	"	Astha	9	Female
16	"	Pradip	10	Male

Data Analysis

After collecting data through semi-structured interviews, I transcribed the interviews, coded them and analysed thematically as suggested by Cohen et al. (2002) as per the research questions. The data were analysed critically following an inductive approach into different themes.

Results and Discussion

The study found how secondary level students experience cyberbullying through Facebook. The findings of the study are categorised into three themes developed from the information. They are students' experience of hacking ID, blackmailing, threatening, and bullying through Facebook, impact of cyberbullying in study and coping strategies against cyberbullying through Facebook and disclosing privacy and harassment. It was found that all the participants used Facebook to upload photos, videos; post status; like and comment in others' status; and interact with their friends, relatives and teachers. Most of the participants reported that they learnt to use Facebook when they were taught through online classes during COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding cyberbullying, Rekha from Advance School said:

Cyberbullying is extremely dangerous. When we keep our personal information into our account and if it is hacked, it can be leaked. Wrong messages can be forwarded to others. Photos and videos can be shared publicly.

For cyberbullying, if we visit video section, online sexual harassment is seen more as I have already said. I don't tell Facebook itself is bad but, misusing the social media is bad. Those people who are involved in it can upload in Facebook, and others like providing link of fake websites, promoting the fake apps and so on. (Dikendra, Janajyoti School)

The above remarks indicated that cyberbullying has created numerous problems along with the increment the use of Facebook. Despite the positive use of Facebook in communication and sharing ideas among a large number of people, it was found missing in a great amount. Moreover, it has been found that they experienced cyberbullying in various ways like sharing memes on Facebook wall and

messenger, using nick names, using unacceptable words, teasing, threatening, hacking Facebook password and using, proposing for being close friend and joining photos and uploading, sending messages time and again and calling during night time. This findings align with Ozansoy et al. (2018) who reported that the massive use of the internet in an uncontrolled way and the lack of parents' control in over using of technology raised cyberbullying among the students.

Hacking ID, Blackmailing, Threatening and Bullying through Facebook

Although the students started using Facebook for the purpose of online classes, it could not be limited only with academic activities. The students were found using Facebook for entertainment first, and gradually they faced several problems including id hacking, blackmailing, threatening and bullying. For example:

I used Facebook only for the purpose of online class [...] after a month, my ID got hacked. [...] my sister told me that she had found another ID having my photo and name. [...] The hacker posted my photo mentioning my wife in caption. He used to comment roughly in other's status. My brother scolded him, too and later that ID was deactivated. (Smriti, Advance School)

When I was in grade eight, there was a fake ID of mine having cover photo of my family [...] and there used to be posting status time and again. [...] comment negatively in other's status/posts. [...] Telling 'budo' husband to other boys. Once I talked, but he used to threaten me. Then, I mom talked with him and he removed my photo. (Prajina, Public Academy)

The above remarks explained students' experiences how their Facebook IDs were hacked and got harassed from unknown people. The hackers threatened them by criminal activities such as posting vulgar status and sent unnecessary messages to others. This situation made the majority of the teenager girls to use Facebook confidently. Similar to this finding, Brody and Vangelisti (2017) highlighted how school students were harassed with the activities including private comments, photograph strategies, group bullying along with bullying through fake profiles which directly and indirectly victimised persons being harassed. Likewise, Astha of Janajyoti School shared:

When I was studying in grade 7, someone scolded me from message. First, he asked my name, sent some photos, threatened to visit home and beat me. I shared it to the friends. They suggested blocking him. Then I kept him blocked.

She reported her experience of being scolded rather than doing any legal action against the bullying. Comparatively, more girls were harassed and threatened than boys. It shows gender discrimination in cyberbullying, too. Rajbhandari and Rana (2022) also reported that the students who have been victimised of bullying experienced of getting exploited from repeated suppressions, insulted messages, lies, manipulated prank-like messages, hacking Facebook ID, and other unethical activities.

Showing Disobedience and Power from Cyberbullying

The participants involved in the study reported that cyberbullying activities performed cyberbullying to make fun of it, to embrace the innocent persons and to revenge against being bullied. The cyberbullies also disclosed the confidential messages and data sharing publicly with other Facebook users. They said that those who were out of track and felt themselves as dominant perform cyberbullying. Furthermore, it was found that cyberbullying took place due to the lack of proper care from their parents to their children:

A child does a wrong activity, he/she might not know that; and he/she may know if the parents care that. [...] The persons who don't obey their parents [...] whose parents also give mobile without proper monitoring can perform cyberbullying. It can be done by senior to junior. Harassing, leaking private things, [...] teasing, adding in unnecessary groups. (Rohit, Janajyoti School)

Rohit's claim showed that Cyberbullies use to perform bullying without a clear reason which impacted to the innocent users of Facebook. Many students were victimised of cyberbullying when they accepted the friend requests of the unknown persons. Moreover, it explored that cyberbullying happens from messenger too in case they accept unknown friend request. This aligns with the findings of Kota et al. (2014) who viewed that the bullies have impacted others mainly into their adulthood in order to show their power through hacking, publicizing disagreement, posting shameful content, and related activities as cyberbullying.

Insecure Feeling of Using Facebook

The study also found that cyberbullying makes the victimised feel insecure of using Facebook. They get tortured, harassed and even lose their prestige as they are thought negatively among family, friends and relatives along with being humiliated. For example, Sandesh from Public Academy said:

My friend faced [...] a girl but it was a boy [...] They become very closed. [...] The bully one used to ask my friend if he could recharge. [...] and he rubbed my friend's money. The bully must be intimate person. He [...] felt irritated and arrogant. [...] had to manage money by stealing.

Bully is itself not good because he/she has habit of doing so. His academic cannot be good. To bullied, it is possibility to be depressed, anxiety. Then, if someone is bullied may be in depression and can attempt suicide. (Sandhya, Public Academy)

In addition to Sandesh, Sandhya also reported cyberbullying as a bad practice. Both bully and bullied could not progress in their academic performance as they only thought about the activities they performed and they have been suppressed. Although the students created Facebook account for the purpose of study during lockdown period (2020-21), they became awkward of using it due to such cyberbullying activities. Similar to this finding, Abaido (2020) reported that students do not prefer to report about the bullying because of confidential issue. Likewise, Subaramaniam et al. (2022) reported that anxiety/depression is the highest issue of cyberbullying which bring the bullied with aggression to suicidal thoughts or attempts. As a result, some of them have chosen to use it in careless and inappropriate ways like hurting, humiliating, embarrassing, and personally attacking others suffering from depression, having their education compromised, and committing other unusual activities as well.

Coping Strategies against Cyberbullying through Facebook

With the development of new platforms of ICT, people involve in abusive activities day by day. Cyberbullying is one of them that they commit mainly from social media including Facebook. The participants reported that they did not feel secured from it. They further suggested that a person should update Facebook profile with authentic name and real photo. The participants also suggested not to accept unknown friend request and start chatting with them to be safe from being victim of cyberbullying. In addition, to reduce cyberbullying through Facebook, Divas from Public Academy argued:

It cannot be eliminated completely but we can report it to Facebook. [...] it can be complained with parents or teachers if it happens [...] strict law should be

formulated. We shouldn't accept the friend request of unknown people to be safe from cyberbullying. Friends should not be made. Private matter should be well secret. If someone is bullying, it should be reported to the parents promptly. Self-awareness protects us from bullying. (Rekha, Advance School)

Both Divas and Rekha's remarks showed that instant complain against the bullies is a must to lessen the cyberbullying activities. It can discourage the bullies to abuse Facebook. Besides, the Facebook users should not disclose the account ID and password to anyone else and confidentiality must be well maintained. Similarly, it was explored from the study that mass awareness programs can assist to control performing cyberbullying. Moreover, Rajbhandari and Rana (2022) suggested strict cyber laws and cybersecurity should be strongly implemented along with handling strong and confidential policy while working with technology. However, Tozzo et al. (2022) argued that critical awareness of digital knowledge, anti-bullying trainings to the teachers-parents-students, students' involvement in extracurricular activities and proper legislative actions play vital role to eliminate cyberbullying. Thus, there must be systematic mechanism to find out the bullies and punish them along with launching awareness programmes. Furthermore, if the school level students got opportunity to know about impacts of cyberbullying as a part of their course curriculum, it can be reduced in some extent. Critical awareness of digital knowledge, training to the teachers and the parents, involving students in extracurricular activities, legislative actions.

Conclusion and Implications

With the development of information and communication technology, the excessive use of computer and mobile has expanded, leading more students to become enclosed with the gadgets. Very offensive activities have been found along with the development of technology. This study has explored the students' experience of cyberbullying through Facebook. It tried to depict how the innocent students who used Facebook for the purpose of academic activities but became victim of cyberbullying. Similarly, secondary level students (teenagers) are exhausted of using Facebook due to fear of being cyberbullied. Mostly, the girls who are innocent and have no adequate knowledge about the internet use have been victimized of cyberbullying. Bullies show their power to the innocent and start threatening, harassing, dominating and scolding without being identical. Private messages, photos and other confidential things are snatched and shared publicly which demotivate the users to be with the social media. Cyberbullying directly affects the students who perform and who are victim as they think most of the time about it and indirectly it psychologically weakens the victimized ones. Although the constitution of Nepal has provision of living with self-stem, the victimized people of cyberbullying are deprived of it as the mechanism of finding the abusers – only the bullied have to be suppressed and depressed themselves beyond of getting justice. The findings of the study suggest making strict law, keeping in school level curriculum and launching mass awareness in order to cope with the cyberbullying activities found in the school level students of Nepal.

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Betendra Kumar Dahal is an M.Phil. Scholar in English Education at Nepal Open University as well as executive member of NELTA Karnali Province. He has been teaching English in different levels for 14 years and currently, he is a graduate teacher of English at Sainik Awasiya Mahavidyalaya Surkhet. His interests highlight teaching English, integrating technology in Education and educational research.