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Cyberbullying awareness among young adults in Udaipur city

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has become a growing concern with the increasing use of digital technologies and social media among young adults. The present study aimed at the study of gender differences in awareness about cyberbullying among young adults of Udaipur City, Rajasthan. The descriptive research design was used and 150 young adults (75 males and 75 females) aged 18-25 years were selected by purposive sampling from five government co-educational colleges. Data were collected through a self-structured questionnaire using Google Forms and analysed using frequency, percentage, and ranking techniques. The results indicated that the majority respondents had good awareness about cyberbullying. Female respondents indicated a desire to start cyberbullying awareness at an earlier age and expressed slightly more knowledge of support organizations, while male respondents indicated greater confidence in their online privacy and safety. Respondents from both genders considered lack of awareness about the consequences of cyberbullying as the main contributing factor and identified online safety education, awareness programmes, and stronger cyber laws as important measures for its prevention. The study suggests that continuous awareness programmes and digital safety education can help promote safer online behaviour among young adults.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, awareness, young adults, gender differences, prevention

Introduction

The fast development of information and communication technology has altered how people communicate, interact, and trade information. The ubiquitous use of the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms has resulted in unparalleled opportunities for education, communication, entertainment, and networking. However, in addition to these benefits, digital technologies have generated new difficulties, with cyberbullying emerging as a serious public health and social concern (Anderson, 2018). Cyberbullying, unlike conventional bullying, can occur at any time and from any location using digital platforms, allowing offenders to remain anonymous and making it impossible for victims to avoid repeated abuse.

Cyberbullying is defined as intentional and repetitive aggressive behaviour carried out via electronic communication with the objective to cause psychological, emotional, or social harm to another person (Smith *et al.*, 2008). It occurs on a variety of digital channels, such as social networking sites, instant messaging apps, online gaming platforms, emails, and webpages. Cyberbullying can take many forms, including sending abusive messages, spreading rumours, creating phony profiles, cyberstalking, social exclusion, trolling, and disclosing private information without consent. These behaviours can have substantial consequences for an individual's mental health, self-esteem, social relationships, and overall well-being (Smith and Steffgen, 2013; Kowalski *et al.*, 2014).

Young adults are especially vulnerable to cyberbullying because they spend so much time on digital platforms for academic, professional, and social reasons. Continuous social media use raises both the likelihood of online interaction and the risk of cyberbullying. Previous research has shown that cyberbullying among young adults is linked to anxiety, sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor academic achievement, and strained social interactions (Peled, 2019). According to the World Health Organization (2024), one in every six adolescents and young people has encountered cyberbullying, while UNICEF (2019)

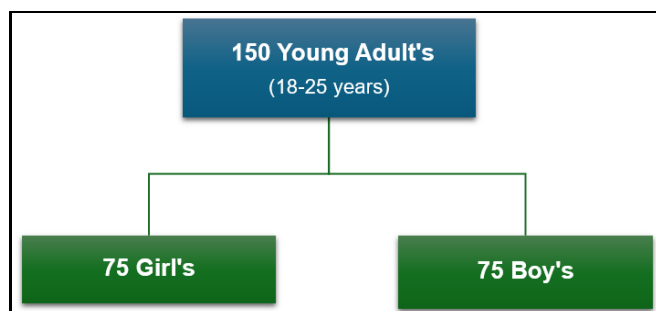
estimates that one in every three young people has been subjected to online bullying, showing the global scope of the issue.

In India, the rapid growth of internet access and social media use has led to a significant increase in cybercrime and online harassment. According to the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, millions of cybercrime complaints have been registered in recent years, indicating the increasing misuse of digital technologies (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). Although cyberbullying affects both men and women, research indicates that gender variations exist in victimization, coping mechanisms, and understanding of online safety. Females are more likely to undergo relational and emotional cyberbullying, whilst males are more likely to face direct forms of online aggression.

Although various studies have investigated cyberbullying among adolescents and schoolchildren, few have focused on young adults, particularly in regional contexts like Udaipur City. The limited research has explored gender differences in awareness related to cyberbullying, online safety, and preventive measures. Understanding these differences is essential for developing effective awareness programmes and promoting safer online behaviour among young adults. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess awareness regarding cyberbullying among young adults and also to compare gender differences if any exist, with the aim of providing evidence that may support awareness initiatives and encourage a safer digital environment.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design to examine awareness regarding cyberbullying among young adults in Udaipur City, Rajasthan. A total of 150 young adults in the age range of 18 to 25 years included in the study, from five government coeducational colleges in Udaipur City using purposive sampling. An equal number of male and female participants were included to compare gender-based findings. Data was collected through Google form using a self-developed background information Performa and a Self-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to assess participants' awareness regarding cyberbullying.



Sample Selection Flow Chart

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analysed using frequency, percentages and rank distribution to describe the respondents' characteristics and compare male and female participants.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on perception of seriousness, ideal age for Awareness, and Platform Responsibility

n = 150

S. No.	Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Perception of college staff's seriousness		
	I don't know	44	29.33%
	No	44	29.33%
	Yes	62	41.33%
2.	Perceived right age for awareness		
	10-12	38	25.33%
	13-15	51	34%
	16-18	49	32.67%
	18 above	12	8%
3.	Knowledge of local support organizations		
	Yes	69	46%
	No	81	54%
4.	Internet platforms' responsibility		
	Yes	106	70.67%
	Not sure	13	8.67%
	No	31	20.67%
5.	Confidence in online privacy and safety		
	Very confident	62	41.33%
	Slightly confident	25	16.67%
	Not confident	9	6%
	Moderately confident	54	36%

Table 1 presents the respondents' perception of awareness regarding cyberbullying. It was determined that 41.33% of the respondents felt that college staff should take cyberbullying seriously, 29.33% were not sure of this, and 29.33% believed that cyberbullying was not taken seriously by college staff. When asked about the appropriate age to introduce cyberbullying awareness, the largest proportion of respondents (34%) preferred the age group of 13-15 years. This was followed by 16-18 years (32.67%) and 10-12 years (25.33%), with only 8 percent saying awareness should start after 18 years. More than half of the respondents (54%) were not aware of local organizations that provide support to victims of cyberbullying, whereas 46 percent reported that they were aware of such organizations. Majority (70.67%) agreed that the internet platforms should be responsible in the prevention of cyberbullying. In comparison, 20.67 percent disagreed and 8.67 percent were unsure. Regarding online privacy and safety, 41.33 percent of the respondents described themselves as very confident, followed by 36 percent who were moderately confident. 16.67 percent reported being slightly confident and 6 percent were not confident. The results overall suggest that young adults have a reasonably high level of awareness of cyberbullying. However, limited awareness of local support organizations suggests that greater efforts are needed to improve access to information and support services at local level.

Table 2: Perceived factors contributing to the persistence, methods for victim empowerment, and suggested preventive actions for cyberbullying

n = 150

S. No.	Variables	Frequency (f)	Rank
1.	Contributing Factors		
	Lack of awareness about the consequences	50	1
	Anonymity of online platforms	21	2
	Poor digital citizenship education	20	3
	Peer pressure or group dynamics	18	4
	Lack of strict enforcement of laws	15	5
	Social inequalities or power imbalances	13	7
	Inadequate support for victims	13	7
2.	Methods Can Provide Victims of Cyberbullying More Power		
	Educating on online privacy and safety	75	1
	Promoting positive self-esteem and self-care	51	2
	Teaching assertiveness skills	49	3
	Encouraging offline activities and socializing	44	4
	Providing emotional support	39	5
	Connecting them with professional help	30	6
3.	Suggested Actions to address or prevent cyberbullying		
	Programs for education and awareness	86	1
	More stringent laws and rules	84	2
	Enhanced social media platform reporting and moderation mechanisms	61	3 3
	Helpful therapy for victims	43	4
	Enhanced parental oversight	31	5
	Support and engagement from the community	31	5

Table 2 presents the respondents' perceptions regarding the factors contributing to cyberbullying, methods for empowering victims, and suggested preventive actions. Among the contributing factors, lack of awareness about the consequences secured the first rank, indicating that respondents considered it the most important factor contributing to cyberbullying. This was followed by anonymity of online platforms and poor digital citizenship education, which secured the second and third ranks, respectively. Regarding methods for empowering victims,

educating individuals about online privacy and safety obtained the first rank, followed by promoting positive self-esteem and self-care and teaching assertiveness skills. With respect to preventive actions, programmes for education and awareness received the first rank, while more stringent laws and rules and enhanced social media platform reporting and moderation secured the second and third ranks, respectively. The results suggest that awareness, digital safety education, and better preventive measures were identified as key strategies to tackle cyberbullying.

Table 3: Gender wise Distribution of respondents based on perception of seriousness, ideal age for Awareness, and Platform Responsibility

S. No.	Variables	Male (n = 75)		Female (n = 75)	
		(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
1.	College staff's take cyberbullying seriously				
	I don't know	21	28	23	30.67
	No	23	30.67	21	28
	Yes	31	41.33	31	41.33
2.	Right age for provide cyberbullying knowledge				
	10-12	14	18.67	24	32
	13-15	26	34.67	25	33.33
	16-18	31	41.33	18	24
	18 above	4	5.33	8	10.67
3.	Do you Know the local organizations and groups deal with cyberbullying				
	Yes	31	41.33	38	50.67
	No	44	58.67	37	49.33
4.	Internet platforms' responsibility for preventing cyberbullying				
	Yes	53	70.67	53	70.67
	No	15	20	16	21.33
	Not sure	7	9.33	6	8
5.	How confident about your online privacy and safety				
	Very confident	34	45.33	28	37.33
	Slightly confident	12	16	13	17.33
	Not confident	4	5.33	5	6.67
	Moderately confident	25	33.33	29	38.67

Table 3 presents gender-wise differences in respondents' awareness regarding cyberbullying. The findings indicate

that an equal proportion of male and female respondents (41.33%) believed that college staff take cyberbullying

seriously. Regarding the appropriate age for cyberbullying awareness, most males (41.33%) considered 16-18 years to be the ideal age, whereas the highest proportion of females (32%) preferred 10-12 years. Awareness of local organizations dealing with cyberbullying was slightly higher among females (50.67%) than males (41.33%). A majority of both male and female respondents (70.67% each) agreed that internet platforms have a responsibility to prevent

cyberbullying. In terms of confidence about online privacy and safety, most males reported being very confident (45.33%), while a higher proportion of females were moderately confident (38.67%). Overall, both genders showed a satisfactory level of awareness regarding cyberbullying, with only minor differences in their responses.

Table 4: Gender wise perceived factors contributing to the persistence, methods for victim empowerment, and suggested preventive actions for cyberbullying

n = 150					
S. No.	Variables	Male (n = 75)		Female (n = 75)	
		(f)	Rank	(f)	Rank
1.	Contributing Factors				
	Anonymity of online platforms	4	7	17	2
	Inadequate support for victims	6	6	7	3
	Lack of awareness about the consequences	21	1	29	1
	Lack of strict enforcement of laws	8	5	7	3
	Peer pressure or group dynamics	12	3	6	5
	Poor digital citizenship education	14	2	6	5
	Social inequalities or power imbalances	10	4	3	7
2.	Methods Can Provide Victims of Cyberbullying More Power				
	Connecting them with professional help	19	6	11	6
	Educating on online privacy and safety	41	1	34	1
	Encouraging offline activities and socializing	27	3	17	5
	Promoting positive self-esteem and self-care	29	2	22	3
	Providing emotional support	20	5	19	4
	Teaching assertiveness skills	25	4	24	2
3.	Suggested Actions to address or prevent cyberbullying				
	Enhanced parental oversight	20	5	11	6
	Enhanced social media platform reporting and moderation mechanisms	36	3	25	3
	Helpful therapy for victims	21	4	22	4
	More stringent laws and rules	40	2	44	1
	Programs for education and awareness	44	1	42	2
	Support and engagement from the community	15	6	16	5

The ranking analysis presented in Table 4 further showed that both male and female respondents, lack of awareness about the consequences secured the first rank, indicating that it was perceived as the most important contributing factor to cyberbullying. However, there were differences in the following ranks. Among males, poor digital citizenship education and peer pressure or group dynamics secured the second and third ranks, whereas among females, anonymity of online platforms obtained the second rank and inadequate support for victims shared the third rank with lack of strict enforcement of laws. As for victim empowerment, educating people about online privacy and safety came in first place for both men and women. Promoting positive self-esteem and self-care was ranked second by male respondents and second by female respondents for teaching assertiveness skills. In terms of preventive actions, programmes for education and awareness received the first rank among males, whereas more stringent laws and rules secured the first rank among females. The results indicated that while both males and females identified awareness as a critical component in preventing cyberbullying, there were some differences in their perspectives regarding the importance of education, legal and support measures.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that young adults have a good level of awareness about cyberbullying. Male and female respondents agreed that online platforms are important in

preventing cyberbullying. The female respondents gave a preference for introducing cyberbullying awareness at an earlier age than the male respondents, and the male respondents showed a little more confidence in their online privacy and security. Respondents from both groups identified lack of awareness about the consequences as the main factor contributing to cyberbullying. They also felt that education, awareness programmes on the internet and better cyber legislation were the most helpful ways of preventing cyberbullying. These findings suggest that increasing awareness and improving online safety education can help create a safer digital environment for young adults.

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