Investigating The Long-Term Psychological Consequences Of Cyberbullying On Victims

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Abstract
The study focused on the enduring psychological impact of cyberbullying on its victims. Cyberbullying, a pervasive issue in the digital age, is known to cause immediate distress, but its long-term effects remain underexplored. This investigation delves into the lasting psychological consequences of cyberbullying, shedding light on the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by victims. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical research, this study aims to elucidate the connections between cyberbullying and persistent psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress. Factors that may exacerbate or mitigate these consequences will be examined, including coping mechanisms, social support, and the role of online and offline environments. The findings of this research have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals, as they emphasize the importance of addressing cyberbullying not only in its immediate context but also in the context of long-term psychological well-being.
Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Psychological consequences, Long-term effects, Victims, Mental health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-esteem*

I.   Introduction

Cyberbullying is bullying that happens over devices that are electronic, and it may contribute to mental wellness concerns including feelings of sadness and anxiety in both the other person and the person being bullied. Cyberbullying is equally detrimental compared to traditional harassment and may take many different forms, including writing emails that are abusive, expressing opinions on social media websites, forwarding sensitive data or conversations, and sending derogatory messages. The probability of cyberbullying grows as people get increasingly accustomed to and become more involved in the world of social media. Social networking platforms that allow free to use remarks may quickly transform into extremely terrifying places for victims of cyberbullying (Quintana-Orts *et al.* 2022). Therefore, threats, antagonistic, demotivating or insulting remarks or messages, as well as altered pictures and videos, can be discussed without the victim's information or approval before they are given a chance to respond, reply.

Someone's emotions of sadness, hopelessness, and stress may be increased if they become uncomfortable about their situation and decide to conceal their dealings with cyberbullying from others in their circle of friends. Inadequate information and support can additionally stop victims from expressing their concerns and cause unstable psychological states. It has been claimed that the enhanced invisibility and public that cyberbullies are able to reach enhance their feelings of power. It is suggested that the absence of an immediate reaction to their behaviour increases cyberbullying that is additionally violent. Since some cyberbullies are also involved in conventional bullying, their deficiency of empathy will probably be more apparent when there is a lack of face-to-face engagement and an immediate reaction to their aggressiveness (Pabian and Vandebosch, 2021). Research suggests that survivors of cyberbullying frequently encounter more severe repercussions compared to victims of traditional bullying, specifically in terms of indicators of depression, due to the enduring and extensive nature of such kinds of harassment. The connection has prompted the hypothesis that the psychological repercussions of cyberbullying may be distinct for the perpetrator than for typical bullies.

Aim and objectives
The main aim of this research topic is to find out the major impact of cyberbullying on the mentality of any person.
● To investigate the psychological and emotional impact of cyberbullying on victims.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention strategies in addressing cyberbullying.
- To explore the legal and ethical considerations in combating cyberbullying.

II. Literature review

Emotional impact of cyberbullying on victims

Cyberbullying is an important cause of anxiety for young people today, and it is easy to understand the reason. According to reality, studies indicate that 32% of kids who are bullied report suffering at least one anxiety symptom. They could additionally feel embarrassed, hurt, or even afraid for their personal safety on top of feeling distressed. Some of the victims of cyberbullying can even put the burden on themselves. Cyberbullying can be particularly distressing as it occurs subconsciously through the Internet and cannot be reversed. Children comprehend that information that is made public is immutable (Pabian *et al.* 2022). They might encounter emotions of vulnerability, humiliation, and anxiety. Once cyberbullying takes place, the negative remarks, tweets, or texts may quickly spread towards many people. The vast number of people who have heard of the bullying could lead to great shame. Children can become socially excluded and humiliated at school due to cyberbullying.

This left them feeling abandoned. In the face of cyberbullying, some parents advise their children to avoid interaction with other people altogether by turning off every gadget they have. However, for a lot of young people, making use of these devices is the main way in which they communicate with others. Victims of online bullying are at a higher risk of developing anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems associated with stress (Azumah *et al.* 2023). Cyberbullying can serve as an important cause of stress for victims, depriving them of their happiness and calm. It can make one feel more nervous and alone. Several investigations indicate a correlation between cyberbullying and mental health issues. One study showed that 93% of cyberbullying victims feel helpless and sad as a consequence of the encounter. Cyberbullying attacks precisely the aspects of its victims' daily lives that make them feel the most vulnerable. It is possible that a youngster who is bullied due to their abnormality also feels nervous about their appearance (Li *et al.* 2023). However, cyberbullying can have an impact on a person's perception of worth, even when this does not seem to be the case.

Intervention and prevention process at young age

Defining harassment as an entire category is an initial step in cyberbullying strategies for avoiding it. Sharing district guidelines and penalties for bullying with personnel, producing an overview of fields where bullying is most probable taking place, providing guidance staff to keep attentive for instances of cyberbullying, spreading a set of variables that might indicate being victimized, forming peer support groups for students new to a school setting, reassuring workers that assault can occur in the form of gay bashing, and providing guidance individuals to respond with violence are the necessary measures for establishing school intervention and prevention. Schools must take actions to avoid cyberbullying which takes place off campus and identify cyberbullying in regulations (Tamrin *et al.* 2022). Poland proposes teaching parents as well as educators on cyberbullying and reducing children' usage of smartphones in the educational setting. Cyberbullying has been brought to the foreground with the expansion of online social networks.

A library's media expertise could serve as a colleague in the struggle against online harassment. Parents and educators are able to work together to teach students about cyberbullying as well as ways to protect themselves from being victimized by it. Schools must implement efforts that avoid occurrences of cyberbullying whether or not students are on campus because of the damage that it affects kids. Students get impacted by cyberbullying irrespective of the setting it happens in but it becomes an especially sensitive subject when it comes outside of the learning environment (Güllü *et al.* 2023). However, administrators at schools should tread gently when disciplining learners for language which takes place away from the classroom, assessing the possibility that the first amendment qualifies. In order to reduce the probability of legal actions, it is beneficial to the health of learners and educational institutions equally to create and implement preventative measures and prevention initiatives that reduce or prevent cyberbullying.

Legal aspects to prevent cyberbullying

As a bully distributes deceptive data about another individual in an attempt to hurt their public image, they are participating in defamation. Defamation refers to malice that has been observed or heard once as in an unrecorded dialogue or a live broadcast, while libel refers to defamation that is viewed or read continuously as in a work of fiction or on a website. A libelous language will damage an individual's credibility, will be addressed at an individual in particular, and will be evident to individuals besides the individual who spoke and those who are receiving slandering (Sorrentino *et al.* 2023). It is conceivable for someone to bring a complaint against a libelous person. Once successful, the complaining party will be awarded financial compensation from the other party. It is feasible to defend one against allegations of libel by stating that the remark in concern was

accurate, was an objective assessment a legitimate critique, not a personal assault, or that the person in question accidentally duplicated the remark without realizing what it meant.

A comment may not be insulting, but it might still be harmful if widely shared. Anytime someone undermines another's or a different organization's safety by conduct or words, that's harassment. It is not required that the person being harassed actually feel threatened to be eligible for the harasser to be held responsible for harassment. Harassment is an infraction that bears an aggregate punishment of 10 years in prison. Once the allegation of libel is circulated about or about a person with influence and has the possibility of causing major damage to that person's credibility, it generally qualifies as illegal conduct. Criminal punishment for defamatory statements may include five years in imprisonment. Intimate image distribution without authorization became illegal in 2015. Consistently or recklessly transmitting photographs of another individual when that individual is unclothed is prohibited (Holfeld *et al.* 2019). The entitlement to free speech is safeguarded in Section 2 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

III. Methodology

Research philosophy

Pragmatism research philosophy has been selected for the present study. Pragmatism stresses the importance of the research problem. The challenge with cyberbullying is to figure out the best way to deal with it after people comprehend what its lasting psychological consequences are. The problem-focused methodology at the core of pragmatism aligns nicely with the objectives of this study (Maarouf, 2019). Pragmatism places a premium on tangible outcomes and empirical research. Recommendations for survivors and stakeholders can be enhanced by collecting actual data and adopting a realistic approach to comprehending the psychological repercussions of cyberbullying.

Research design

Descriptive research design has been identified as appropriate for this study. Surveys, interviews, questionnaires and observations are all instances of methodical data collection processes utilized in descriptive research. These approaches are well-suited to document the wide range of feelings and circumstances that victims of cyberbullying face (Hunter *et al.* 2019).

Research approach

Inductive research approach is the selected research approach of the study. The exploratory approach of inductive research allows it to be ideal for studying numerous phenomena, including the effects of cyberbullying on victims' psychological well-being over the years. It prevents researchers from having presumed something about the topic while investigating. Different people are going to suffer and respond differently to cyberbullying. Using an inductive strategy, researchers can respond quickly to modifications in the problem's environment. In order to capture every aspect of psychological consequences, it allows for an array of data sources to be put together, such as interviews, internet debates, and surveys.

Data collection

Through primary data collection the present analysis has been conducted. In the study, for data collection an online survey has been done using Google form. Anonymous feedback is an attribute of Google Forms, and when victims have the freedom to speak freely without fear of retribution, they might be more willing to share their ordeals, feelings, and psychological repercussions. Concerns about violations of privacy and confidentiality could be mitigated by the application of anonymity (Lakshminarasimhappa, 2022). Numerous individuals of every generation and background have been victims of cyberbullying. Researchers may reach a larger and more diverse sample of victims by conducting their survey online.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis has been in this study. Interpreting and analyzing numerical data is referred to as quantitative data analysis. Using computational methods and statistical tests, it helps the process of making sense of data by showing relationships, trends, and patterns between variables. Moreover, with the help of statistical methods, results from quantitative research can be substantiated with reliable proof. Researchers are able to arrive at more powerful and generalizable conclusions about the psychological effects of cyberbullying if they utilize rigorous statistical methods.
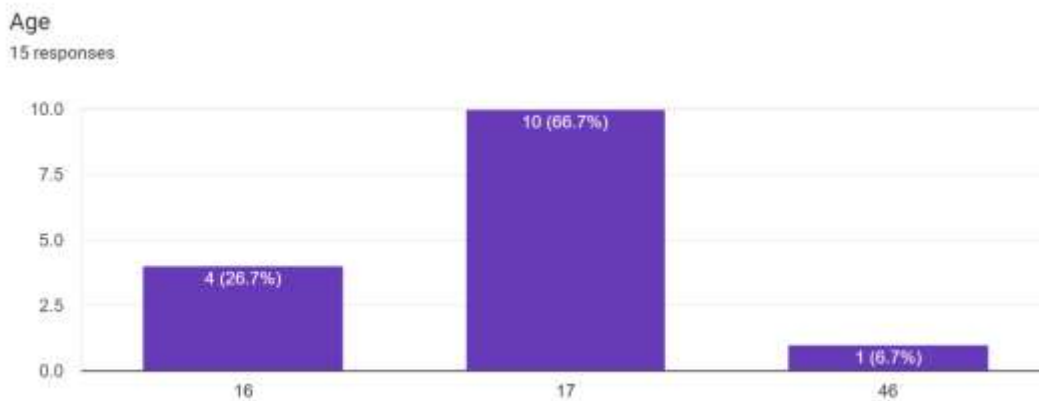
Figure 1: Age
(Source: Google Form)

Age has been selected as a demographic criterion because in assessing prospective clients, this may be an essential factor to take into consideration. Cultural generations are groupings of people who share an identical development timeline. The histogram shows that 26.7% of the respondents are 16 years old. In addition, 10 individuals that are 66.7% of the population belong to the age of 17. Only 1 person means 6.7% of the respondents belong to the age group of 46. Therefore, it can be said that the age group of 17 has contributed greater in the study in comparison to other age groups.
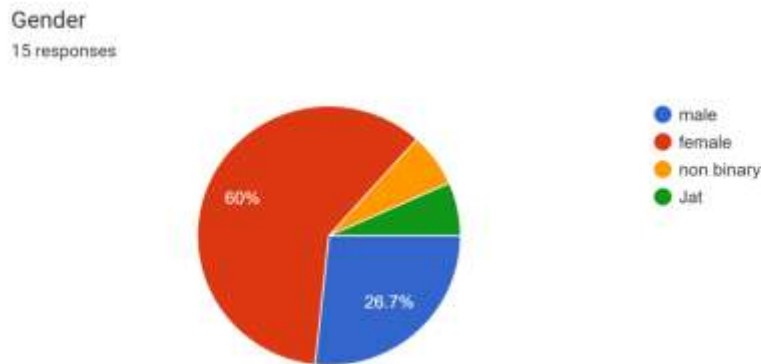
Figure 2: Gender
(Source: Google Form)

Gender is another demographic factor that has been selected in the study. There could be a difference in the effects of relationships based on sex. Youth who have positive interactions with responsible adults, such as parents, are more unlikely to participate in criminal behavior. However, young women are more affected by these connections than young men. 60% of survey participants are women, 27% are men, and the rest of them fall into the "other" organization.

Have you ever experienced any form of cyberbullying, including online harassment, threats, or humiliation?
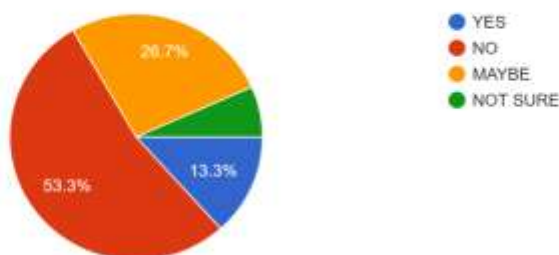
15 responses

Figure 3: Personal opinion of cyberbullying
(Source: Google Form)

Any kind of online assault, especially threats and hostile language, are prohibited. Additionally, sharing personal data or pictures with the intent to cause distress or humiliation qualifies as cyberbullying. Photos, texts, or web sites that have not been removed after numerous requests are also instances of cyberbullying. It is something uploaded online with the intent to cause harm, harass, or annoy another individual. Due to anonymous or difficult tracking, cyberbullying can prove extremely detrimental and unsettling. It is also difficult to control, and the victim could never know how many people have seen their posts or communication (Salem and Abu Al Diyar, 2021). As people constantly monitor their computers and mobile devices, they can be abused endlessly. The continuous and common nature of cyberbullying has been proven to have greater adverse effects for victims, particularly depression symptoms, than traditional bullying. As a consequence, cyberbullying usually appears in frequent encounters that are discourteous, threatening, awkward, or otherwise harmful, often with additional problems as a consequence of the cyberbully's anonymity and ongoing access to their victims. 26.7% of people may support this statement, 53.3% people do not support this statement and 13.3% people support it.

Do you think cyberbullying is a significant problem at our schools
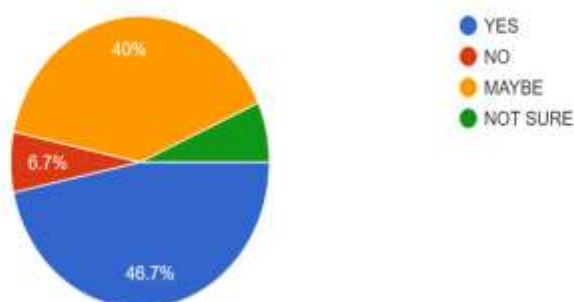
15 responses

Figure 4: Cyberbullying is a significant issue in school
(Source: Google Form)

Students have at all times access to social media as well as the internet due to the growing number of smartphones, tablets, and PCs (Huang *et al.* 2021). Due to this increased access, cyberbullying has become more prevalent than before. Kids today have their backs to their computers for hours on end, which makes it nearly impossible to prevent cyberbullying. Children and teenagers can experience these effects continually and strongly. Due to the anonymity offered by the internet, cyberbullies have the capacity to more readily practice damaging or cruel behavior without worrying about immediate consequences, and bullies may become encouraged by this circumstance (Breitsohl *et al.* 2022). Cyberbullying can happen anytime and anywhere, unlike in-person or school-based bullying. As they might be tormented at any time, victims might have

difficulty moving away from it. 14.3% of people may support this statement, 14.3% of people do not support this statement and 71.4% of people support it.

Students who are cyberbullied might find it hard to focus on their schoolwork. Victims and offenders of serious, ongoing, or frequent cyberbullying can experience anxiety, depression, and various issues associated with stress. Several adolescents have even perished from attempts at suicide. School expulsion, suspension, and disciplinary proceedings against cyberbully players on sports teams are all conceivable. Teens may suffer legal repercussions if cyberbullying develops to a severe level.

Do you believe that cyberbullying has had a negative impact on your mental health?
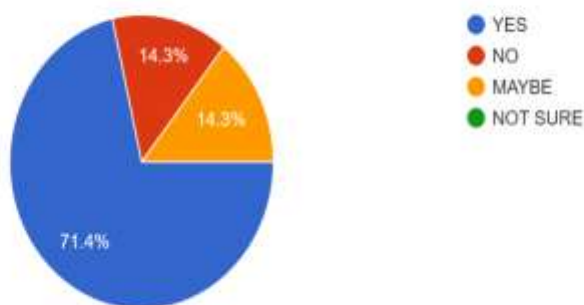14 responses

Figure 5: Negative impact on mental health
(Source: Google Form)

The continuous and common nature of cyberbullying has been demonstrated to have greater adverse effects for victims, particularly symptoms of depression, compared to traditional bullying. This link has caused some to speculate whether the psychological repercussions of cyberbullying differ from those of traditional bullies. Researchers have found that 39% of cyberbullyers dropped out of school, 37% displayed criminal conduct, 32% took part in frequent drug use, and 16% were extremely depressed, in contrast to 21% of non-bullyers (McLoughlin *et al.* 2020). Although there is a great deal of overlap between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, certain studies have shown that cyberbullying has a reduced likelihood of depression. 14.3% of people may support this statement, 42.9% of people do not support this statement and 21.4 % of people support it.

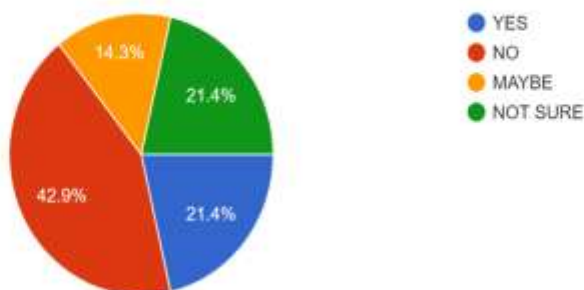Do you think that people should have the right to say or do whatever they like online
14 responses

Figure 6: Rights of the internet users
(Source: Google Form)

One cannot have freedom of speech if no one has the right to have or express any point of view. Speech freedom is an essential tenet of democratic countries. It promotes free speech, which is vital for healthy debate, novel concepts, and growth in society. In an ideal world, the internet could uphold this fundamental human

decency. Protecting children, minorities, and other groups who could be disproportionately impacted by internet harm is an overarching objective of regulations and recommendations. Limits can be acceptable if doing this is the only way to ensure their safety. Many websites have unique rules and regulations for members and users. Once a user joins one of these offerings, they are committing to abide by these rules.

These sites also have an obligation to prevent abuse and promote secure discourse. Certain kinds of speech have the ability to cause physical harm, division in society, and even violence (Batmaz *et al.* 2020). Negative consequences can be experienced in the real world when acts of discrimination, harassment, cyberbullying, and the spread of false data happen. Children, members of minority groups, and those living in poor neighborhoods could be more vulnerable to cyberattacks. Laws may protect individuals from assault and harassment. 20% of people may support this statement, 53.3% of people do not support this statement and 20 % of people support it.
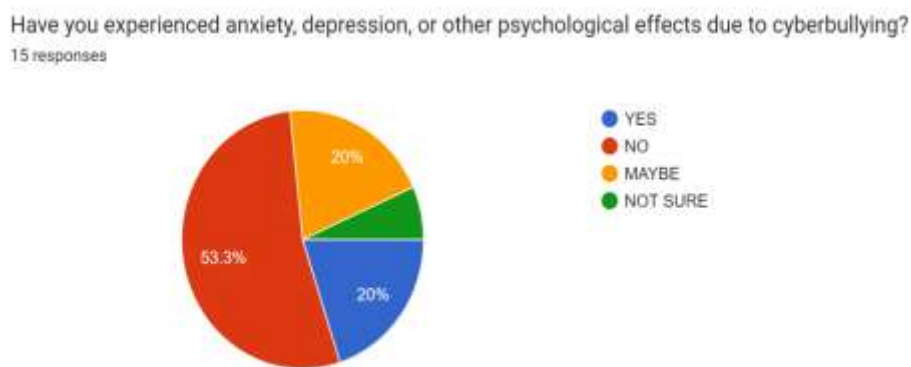

Figure 7: Opinion about depression and anxiety
(Source: Google Form)

Mental health issues, heightened anxiety and stress, depression, aggression, and a lack of self-esteem are all results of cyberbullying. The psychological effects of cyberbullying may continue long after the bullying ends. These consequences of cyberbullying can leave victims feeling embarrassed for a long time. As committed through social media posts that are not deleted instantly, cyberbullying can have a longer-lasting impact. High levels of helplessness and worry can occur. Victims of cyberbullying might discover that their network of friends decreases if their buddies are also afraid to associate with them. As a consequence, the victim feels rejected by society and has no family or friends to turn to for emotional support. Anger is an expected reaction to cyberbullying and its repercussions (Marcum and Higgins, 2019). Anger tends to be the most prevalent feeling within the victim's range of reactions. As bullied youngsters reach their limit of tolerance, they can resort to violent means to exact their revenge, which is demonstrated in school shootings and other violent behaviors. Moreover, if a child experiences harassment online and feels powerless to stop it, taking revenge may be the only way to feel powerful again.

Figure 8: Protection of privacy and security
(Source: Google Form)

Protecting online accounts with unique and strong passwords is very necessary in this case. In order to prevent forgetting complex passwords, one should think about using a password manager. Making constant use of two-factor authentication when entering online accounts is also necessary. Cyberbullies should have a more difficult time breaking into accounts with this additional safeguard in place. One should be careful about sharing excessive amounts of personal data online. It is required to check the social media privacy settings and limit access to the posts. There are typically ways to report inappropriate content or people on nearly all websites. Reporting incidents of cyberbullying to the site administrators must be done if one encounters them (Giumetti and Kowalski, 2022). They have the authority to punish those responsible.

It is possible to generally mute or ban cyberbullies on most social media sites. People must use end-to-end encrypted messaging applications when talking about or exchanging confidential data. They should also consult with security experts or legal professionals if the cyberbullying continues or worsens. One can get guidance from them regarding how to safeguard oneself and take proper legal action. 86 % of people that have participated in it, support it.
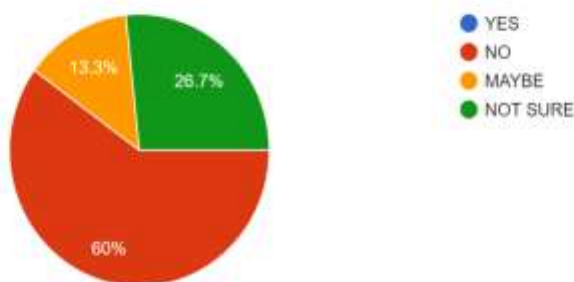

Figure 9: Social media can fight against cyberbullying
(Source: Google Form)

There needs to be an organized effort by technology companies, social media locations, and legislators to identify practical solutions to the issue of online harassment. Important steps mainly involve strengthening reporting and blocking structures, investing in moderation instruments, and educating users on proper online behavior. In late 2019, Instagram launched Comment Warning and Feed Post Warning systems, which employ artificial intelligence (AI) to notify users before they post data that might be construed as unsuitable or harmful. Similarly, Facebook began notifying users a few years ago when their soon-to-be-posted remarks or captions matched material that had been marked as offensive. The automatic identification of language that violates TikTok's rules started in early 2021, enabling users to either edit their post or remove it (Yi and Zubiaga, 2023). Nudges were introduced in late 2022 and are computationally driven to promote good conduct among users who have already uploaded incorrect data. 13.3% of people may support this statement, 60% of people do not support this statement and 26.7 % of people support it.
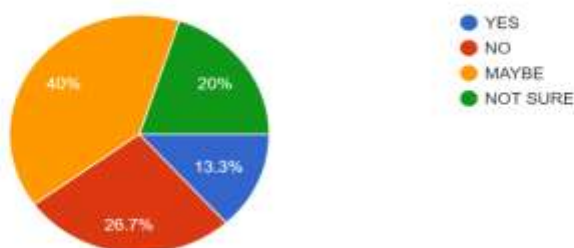

Figure 10: Laws and regulations related to cyberbullying
(Source: Google Form)

The United States as an entire nation lacks any laws regarding cyberbullying, but a number of states have enacted their own legislation. Many states have passed anti-bullying laws that specifically tackle cyberbullying in educational settings. Federal laws such as the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) could offer protections for victims of cyberbullying. The Protection from Harassment Act is one of a number of anti-cyberbullying laws in the United Kingdom (Hani *et al.* 2019). Delivering an electronic message with the intent to cause distress or anxiety is punishable under the Malicious Communications Act.

The Criminal Code of Canada possesses provisions concerning cyberbullying. Certain offenses can be perpetrated online, including bullying and posting threats. In order to combat cyberbullying in schools, a number of states and provinces have enacted anti-bullying legislation. The Information Technology Act of India includes provisions that address cyberbullying, including criminalizing the act of the dissemination of harmful or obscene content online. The government additionally took steps to govern social media in an attempt to reduce cyberbullying within its borders. 40% of people may support this statement, 26.7% of people do not support this statement and 13.3 % of people support it.
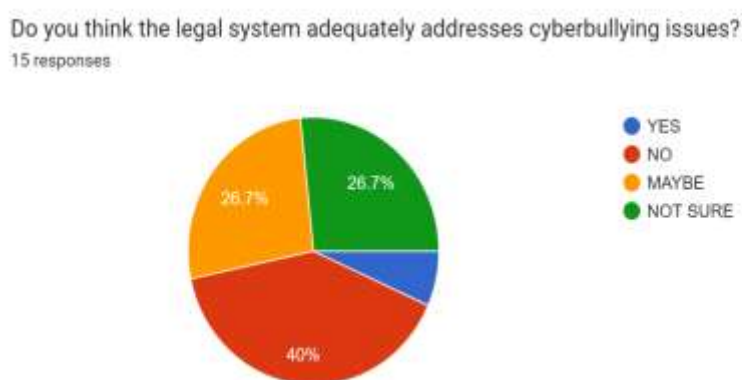

Figure 11: Legal system against cyberbullying
(Source: Google Form)

Laws in a number of nations have directly addressed the issue of cyberbullying. These rules may forbid certain online behaviors, such as stalking, threatening, or sharing sexually explicit content without permission (Viner *et al.* 2019). Although there are laws in place, they have to be implemented properly. Moreover, if authorities decide to investigate and punish instances of cyberbullying, they must have access to the appropriate equipment, resources, and training. In addition to its global reach, the internet may raise issues of jurisdiction. Once a cyberbullying impact involves individuals or platforms across multiple countries, it can be hard to figure out whose legal authority prevails.

Striking an equilibrium between the pressing requirement to eradicate cyberbullying and individual rights to privacy is occasionally easy. The way in which authorities investigate and react to cyberbullying could be influenced by privacy laws, among other factors. Individuals' propensity to report cyberbullying incidents frequently correlates with the effectiveness of the legal system. Victims need to report the incidents to law enforcement, while certain platforms could have unique reporting methods. It is essential to investigations that there is an adequate record of the events. 26.7% of people may support this statement, 40% of people do not support this statement and 26.7 % of people support it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the following needs to be done at the very least by schools in order to establish a strategy for fighting against cyberbullying. The initial step is to develop a definitive definition of cyberbullying. The second is to put into effect strict guidelines to guarantee everyone is on the identical page. Staff, learners, and relatives must be educated on the regulation and educated on how to identify incidents of cyberbullying to enable it to be properly administered. Although schools cannot regulate what learners do on their own electronic devices when not at school, they might take steps to inform kids that bullying is unethical and can have a long-term impact on their classmates. Different experts highlight the value of studies that inquire into both victim and offender demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, political affiliation, and financial standing. This knowledge may assist with influence the conceptualization of more evidence-based approaches to therapy.

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