

Cyberbullying on social media platforms among university students in the United Arab Emirates

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Introduction

Modern communication now almost exclusively relies on online technology, which can foster destructive or harmful behaviours. A significant example of such destructive or harmful behaviours is cyberbullying. Research suggests that cyberbullying is characterised by a transformation from the traditional bullying forms to online forms (Li, 2007) through social media platforms. Constant exposure to and interaction with online technologies, regardless of the convenience they provide, also expose its users to certain online connections that may at some point put their safety and emotional and psychological well-being at risk. Cyberbullying is considered one of the potential risks of relying on online technologies.

Recent research studies have revealed that cyberbullying and online harassment are considerable problems for users of social media platforms, especially young people.

A 2016 report of the Cyberbullying Research Centre indicates that 33.8% of middle-and high-school students aged between 13 and 17 are at some point subject to being victims of cyberbullying. Across most of the recent studies conducted in this sphere in the last decade, the prevalence rates of cyberbullying range from 10% to

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40% (Kowalski et al., 2014; Lenhart, 2010; O'Brennan, Bradshaw & Sawyer, 2009).

For both individuals and organisations, the experience of cyberbullying has also been linked with significant negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, sleeping and eating disorders, and decreased academic performance (Beran & Li, 2005; Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finkelhor, 2007; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007).

Moreover, bullycide has been an emergent phenomenon in many societies. It is a hybrid term that refers to the phenomenon of young people who experience different forms of bullying and its consequences taking their own lives. Tragic suicides resulting from bullying were recently reported in Canada, the United States of America (US), and the United Kingdom (UK). Such incidents also indicate the gravity of different forms of bullying (online and offline), especially through social media platforms where the victim has nowhere to hide and is constantly exposed to aggression.

Previous research has found different correlates and consequences associated with specific forms of cyberbullying (Waasdrop & Bradshaw, 2011). Physical and psychological health-related and academic performance-related impacts have been cited as major correlations in both traditional and cyberbullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2013).

Significantly, a need exists for additional research to examine the characteristics of cyberbullying in Arab communities due to its profound effects. The youth in the Arab world mostly suffers from

different forms of bullying in silence due to social and cultural constraints.

Therefore, the current study aims to examine the pervasiveness of cyberbullying among university students in an Arab community by answering the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the prevalence rates of cyberbullying among university students in Arab communities?

RQ 2: What are the different forms of cyberbullying on social media platforms among youth in Arab communities?

RQ 3: What are the youth's views on cyberbullying in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)?

RQ 4: Do students prefer to remain silent after being cyberbullied, or do they report such incidents?

Literature review

Theoretical framework. The spiral of silence theory (1974) helps to explain why individuals sometimes feel unable to speak up when bullied. The theory indicates that bullying victims tend to become further isolated, as they have nowhere to escape. Some scholars believe that the spiral of silence effect does not exist or is very weak in online communication contexts. Chaffee and Metzger (2001) suggest that the “spiral of silence” in its original form may have little predictive power in the new media environment. Further, Schulz and Roessler (2012) theorise that as individuals can select the information they receive online, they believe they are surrounded by more like-minded people online than in real-world contexts. Thus, the projection effect will decrease the fear of isolation, and individuals will be more likely to express their

opinions online, minimising the spiral of silence effect on the internet. Other early critics draw attention to two more aspects of the internet that can reduce the spiral of silence effect: anonymity and lack of interpersonal presence. However, empirical studies have since found support for the spiral of silence effect in online social environments, even those with anonymity (Yun & Park, 2011)

The spiral of silence theory was primarily applied to political science and public opinion studies. It states that people tend to remain silent when they fear that their views don't lie with the majority opinion. The reasons for such silence is the fear that they will be rejected and the fear of isolation. The longer people remain silent, the more likely they are to spiral into a state of total silence where they are reluctant to voice their opinions

Noelle–Neumann's spiral of silence theory (1974) posits that the fear of social isolation is a fundamental part of the public opinion process. In this theory, public opinion is defined as controversial viewpoints that people can publicly express without becoming isolated. The definition of public opinion applies to both malleable subjects (influx opinions) and fixed customs (cultural values) (Noelle–Neumann, 1974;1977). However, during the first decade of the 21st century, the use of information and communication technologies was an activity that progressively and massively involved young people (Finkelhor, Mitchell &Wolak, 2000) During this time, the international community concerned about bullying began to show interest in a new phenomenon that later came to be known as cyberbullying (Belsey, 2005; Campbell et al. 2013; Li, 2006, Smith et al., 2008).

The spiral of silence remains one of the theories aiming to rationalise the effects of socialisation as well as individuals' behaviours. It helps to explain why students feel unable to speak up when bullied. As bullying has become an online phenomenon, bullies can now remain anonymous and harass their victims every day at any given hour. This forces the bullied into a perpetual state of silence because it is increasingly hard for them to fight back. So even if alone, victims still must withstand the pressure of online bullies.

This results in the bullied becoming further isolated because they have nowhere to turn to or seek help from, especially in Arab societies, considering the cultural and social norms. Therefore, a need exists to identify more proactive measures to help cyberbullying victims.

Cyberbullying and technology. Regardless of the convenience offered, the constant exposure to and interaction with online technologies make users susceptible to certain online interactions that may, at some point, put their safety and emotional and psychological well-being at risk. Cyberbullying is considered one of the potential risks of relying on online technologies. It is considered one of the major examples of technology abuse in the past decade due to its negative and sometimes deadly impacts.

For both individuals and organisations, the experience of cyberbullying has also been linked to a host of negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, sleeping and eating disorders, and decreased academic performance (Beran & Li, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Ybarra et al., 2007).

The first studies on cyberbullying reproduced the schema followed by that on traditional bullying, considering cyberbullying a concrete form of indirect bullying, and its study was very focused on the impact of technological devices. However, cyberbullying is a social problem involving harassment, intimidation, bullying and unjustified aggressiveness undertaken through the use of digital devices by a person or group upon another person (the victim), but whose harassment effects remain and are diffused exponentially. (Grigg, 2010; Slonje et al., 2013; Tokunaga, 2010). Internet and social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter have recently made policy and privacy changes to ensure safe user experience. However, the effectiveness of these tools and efforts in curbing abuse and cyberbullying needs constant monitoring and research.

Definition of cyberbullying. A logical question to ask when investigating cyberbullying is the degree to which our knowledge of traditional bullying carries over to this newer mode of bullying.

Cyberbullying shares three primary features with traditional bullying: It is an act of aggression; it occurs among individuals between whom a power imbalance exists; the behaviour is often repeated (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2007; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Olweus, 2013; Smith, del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2012). The aggressive nature of cyberbullying has been questioned by many, as the act itself takes place on virtual platforms. As with traditional bullying, the power imbalance with cyberbullying can take place in several forms: physical, social, relational, or psychological (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009; Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 2013; Pyzalski, 2011).

According to Willard (2004), cyberbullying can take different forms, ranging from flaming to harassment to cyberstalking. The following list defines different forms of cyberbullying:

Flaming – sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group

Harassment – repeatedly sending a person offensive messages

Cyberstalking – harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating

Denigration(put-downs) – sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person to other people

Masquerade – pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes a person look bad or places the person in potential danger

Outing and trickery – sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images, engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information to be made public

Exclusion – actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group

Impersonation – posing as the victim and electronically communicating negative or inappropriate information with others as if it were coming from the victim

Sexting – distributing nude pictures of another individual without the person's consent

Cyberbullying can occur at different age levels, with any gender, and can relate to physical, cultural, racial, and even

religious biases. The psychological harm inflicted by cyberbullying is considered more damaging than traditional bullying, as harmful material can be preserved and quickly circulated (Grigg, 2012). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) conducted an online survey involving 384 respondents under the age of 18. Their results indicate that various forms of bullying occur online, including being ignored (60.4%), being disrespected (50%), being called names (29.9%), being threatened (21.4%), being picked on (19.8%), being made fun of (19.3%), and having rumours spread (18.8%). Some scholars have cautioned against the findings of the aforementioned study, citing it to possess a convenient sample (Hoover et al., 2007). When gender is considered in bullying-related behaviours, empirical research findings show that males and females show different patterns of bullying (Borg, 1999; Boulton & Underwood, 1992). In addition, it has been suggested that females prefer to use electronic devices such as chat rooms and emails to bully others (Thorp, 2004). Another relatively important finding is that anonymity is inherent in many cyberbullying situations, which may create a sense of powerlessness on the part of the victim (Dooley et al., 2009). Anonymity seems to be a unique characteristic of technology that works well for bullies but against victims.

Another manuscript entitled “Investigating legal aspects of cyberbullying” (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012) explored the cyberbullying in British secondary-level schools from the students’ perspective using a qualitative method of enquiry. The level of awareness and understanding of the legal aspects of cyberbullying were investigated; consideration was also given to views expressed by young people on children’s rights, school sanctions, and

safeguarding responsibilities. The results indicate that students do not really accept the sanctions in place to prevent cyberbullying. However, when asked to consider alternatives, they provided similar suggestions to the already existing ones. Students are aware of their rights, yet they take responsibility for the occurrence of cyberbullying considering their role in prevention to be more prominent than that of adults.

Given that cyberbullying can now occur within any demographic and the use of smartphone applications and social media platforms is on the rise, youth is a sample that warrants our attention. Several studies on cyberbullying have focused on adolescent young people in middle and high schools excluding another important segment – youth and university students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the pervasiveness of cyberbullying among the university students in the UAE, which is a diverse, multicultural society that encompasses over 200 different nationalities.

Variables affecting cyberbullying

The unique factors of electronic communication tools are increasing the breadth of victims of cyberbullying. This research specifically focuses on a few possible factors which contribute to cyberbullying behaviour and which provide the foundation for this study and justifies the proposed research questions.

a) Technology usage competency

Traditional bullies are often characterised as being physically stronger or bigger than their victims. However, cyberbullies do not have to be physically stronger or bigger

that the cybervictims, rather a person's competency in using the technology provides 'power' to become a bully. (Raskauskas et al.2007)

b) Anonymity

Cyberbullying has enabled negative behaviour to be conducted anonymously via online environments. The ability to remain anonymous on the internet lowers the user's self-awareness, and studies have shown that anonymity may also stimulate a person to react impulsively and aggressively towards another online user.

The unknown identity can cause stress and fear for victims. Existing literature has demonstrated anonymity associated with electronic communication tools promotes cyberbullying behaviour (Campbell 2005, Li 2008) Cyberbullying exhibits the characteristic of not providing a face-to- face experience, this allows cyberbullies with the intention stay anonymous appear unknown to their victims (such as setting up false accounts) Anonymity therefor reduces social accountability for the bully, making one feel less guilty when engaged in hostile and/or aggressive acts. Furthermore, Campbell (2005) stated that anonymity offered by the electronic communication tools could produce bullies, who would not normally participate in traditional face-to-face bullying.

c) Information distribution

Traditional bullying typically occurs at a specific time and place, while cyberbullying can happen anywhere, and

anytime, as cybervictims can continue to receive text messages, emails, or see comments wherever they are. (Li, 2008, Smith et al., 2008b)

The breadth of the potential audience also differs between traditional and cyberbullying. With the nature of electronic communication tools, an embarrassing photo/image can be spread much faster and reach a far larger audience size than traditional bullying, which might be confined to a particular social setting.

Research methodology

As cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon, few studies are available on the topic, and very few measures have been developed to assess cyberbullying and its related factors. Some studies have examined cyberbullying as bullying shifting to a new medium. Therefore, it is necessary to explore some of the contributing factors to traditional bullying.

This study collected data using quantitative methodologies to gain a clearer insight into the incidents of cyberbullying. A questionnaire was designed and used to explore students' experiences and understanding of cyberbullying. It consisted of limited choice, scaled responses and open - ended questions. A pilot test was conducted to verify the reliability of the questionnaire for the actual survey. In addition, the theoretical framework and the existing literature guided the development of this study.

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the reliability test was conducted, and the Alpha Chronbach value showed satisfactory results for this research study (Alpha = .718)

Sampling

Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the quality of research depends on “the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted” (p. 97). For this study, random sampling was adopted because the objective was to get a sample representative of the youth in this context. A random sample of university students studying in the UAE aged between 18 and 25 was drawn from two major universities, one located in the emirate of Sharjah and the other in Dubai. The students of these two universities come from different nationalities and socio-cultural backgrounds.

The survey consisted of four parts. The first part collected the sample’s demographic data (gender, ethnic background, and age category). A significant question that was considered was their membership in any student club or the student union at their university, as an attempt to identify their level of social engagement with university activities and peer groups.

Sample demographics

The participants were predominantly Arabs. 88.5% of the sample constituted youth aged between 18 and 25. Only 6.5% of the sample was above 25 years and was mainly postgraduate and MBA students.

Gender	N	%
Male	93	46.5%
Female	107	53.5%
Total	200	100%

Figure 1. Sample distribution according to gender

Ethnic Background	N	%
Arab	149	74.5%
Non-Arab	51	25.5%
Total	200	100%

Figure 2. Sample distribution according to origin

Age	N	%
Under 18	10	5%
Between 18 and 21	119	59.5%
Between 21 and 25	58	29%
Above 25	13	6.5%
Total	200	100%

Figure 3. Sample distribution according to age

Social engagement and involvement with university activities were also essential aspects of detecting the level of active participation and interpersonal relations within peer groups. Some of the students mentioned being members of more than one club, whereas 66.5% of the sample stated that they were not members of any club inside the university campus.

The results of questions relevant to social and extra-curricular activities indicated that 11% of the sample was active members of the sports club. 7% of the sample was members of the student union. 6.5% of the sample was members of the music club. Another 7% stated they were members of clubs located outside the campus (dance or art clubs), and only 5% of the sample was members of the robotics club as they were engineering students. Students who chose not to join any of the university clubs cited “not really interested” and “having no time” as their main reasons.

The second part of the survey explored students' involvement with social media platforms and their online behaviours and views regarding cyberbullying in general.

The third part of the survey examined their personal experience with cyberbullying on social media platforms and the possibility of reporting such incidents.

The fourth part of the survey included students' usage of social media platforms as well as their personal opinions and experiences related to both traditional and cyberbullying. The responses for each item in this section ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on a 5-point Likert scale.

The survey concluded with three open-ended questions to which individuals self-reported personal incidents and their views on curbing cyberbullying.

Unfilled questionnaires were also accepted as an indication of unwillingness to participate and were later separated from the sample, to ensure complete anonymity. Questionnaires were distributed from January to March 2019. Data was analysed using Cronbach's alpha, α (or *coefficient alpha*). Developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951, Cronbach's alpha tests to see if multiple-question Likert scale surveys are reliable. It measures the internal consistency of latent variables that are very difficult to measure in real life.

The formula for Cronbach's alpha is as follows:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

where:

N = the number of items.

c_{ij} = average covariance between item-pairs.

v_{ij} = average variance

The data analysis using SPSS was guided by the initial research questions raised in the early part of the study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical transparency and commitment should be observed throughout all stages of research. Therefore, I obtained the consent of participants, assuring them that their participation was voluntary and free from pressure. Prior to conducting the research, an ethics review was sought from the Research Ethics Committee at the Canadian University, Dubai.

Results

The following section presents the findings from the quantitative analysis of the data secured in response to the questionnaires.

RQ1: Prevalence of cyberbullying among university students in Arab communities

Do you think that cyberbullying exists on social media platforms?	<i>N</i>	%
Yes	182	91%
No	18	9%
Total	200	100%

Figure 4. Cyberbullying on social media platforms among university students

The majority (91%) of participants surveyed in this study agreed with the existence of online harassment in the form of cyberbullying on social media platforms. 72% of the respondents strongly believed that adolescents aged between 14 and 18 were the most susceptible to being cyberbullied. 12% believed that children under the age of 14 were the main targets of cyberbullying, although previous literature tended to weigh the option of traditional bullying during that stage. Due to the cognitive and emotional nature of the adolescent stage, negative behavioural and psychological experiences may impact adolescents' personalities and future lives, and most of the sample was aware of this concept. In the survey, many participants recalled incidents of various forms of traditional bullying from middle and high school that they still clearly remembered and left scars to date. Respondents acknowledged that at that point they had an insufficient level of understanding on how to act appropriately and that they were not well-oriented of their response options.

Concerning the gender specifics of cyberbullying, 62.1% of the participants indicated that both genders could be subject to cyberbullying, whereas 34.1% of the sample believed that women are more likely to be a victimised in comparison to men (3.8%).

On the other hand, 18 out of 200 respondents believed that cyberbullying was absent among university students in the UAE. Therefore, for research integrity and credibility, their responses are excluded from the latter sections of the discussion of results.

RQ 2: Cyberbullying on social media platforms in Arab communities

The participants were overall technologically savvy and reflected long-term familiarity with social media in general. They indicated Instagram (55.5%), Facebook (38%), and Twitter (35.5%) as the top three platforms where they perceived the occurrence of cyberbullying. YouTube and Snapchat were viewed as having fewer incidents of cyberbullying. These results are consistent with that of a study conducted by *ditch the label* in 2014 that found 37% of young adults aged between 13 and 22 experienced cyberbullying frequently.

From 75% of the participants who used Facebook, 54% reported experiencing cyberbullying. Over the past few years, other social media platforms such as Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram have emerged and have overtaken the popularity of Facebook. Therefore, it is understandable why Facebook came in the second place. These new platforms are now being more frequently used for social interactivity amongst teenagers and youth.

Which of the following social media platforms have more cyberbullying?	<i>N</i>	%
1- Facebook	76	38%
2- Twitter	71	35.5%
3- Snapchat	31	15.5%
4- YouTube	50	25%
5- Instagram	111	55.5%
6- Blogs	4	2%

Figure 5. Social media platforms where cyberbullying occurs

Although cyberbullying has increased with the rising popularity of social media platforms, social networking cannot be blamed for the actions of cyberbullies. While social networking

sites may provide a medium for cyberbullies to attack others, the sites themselves neither create bullies nor encourage bullying behaviours.

The results indicate that verbal perpetration is the primary form of cyberbullying among university students. The most prevalent forms are offensive comments (63.5%) and hate speech (40.5%)

If you have come across cyberbullying on social media platforms, what was its form?	<i>N</i>	%
1- Offensive comments	127	63.5%
2- Hate speech	81	40.5%
3- Pictorial shaming	51	25.5%
4- Posting or sharing embarrassing photos and /or videos	66	33%
5- Spreading rumours	65	32.5%
6- Other forms (stalking, using emojis as a form of ridicule)	4	2.0%

Figure 6. Forms of cyberbullying on social media platforms

Concerning peer groups and intimate friends who had experienced any forms of bullying, 33% of the respondents related incidents of real-life bullying, and 31.5% reported to have experienced both forms of bullying, online and offline. Surprisingly, 11.5% of students claimed to associate themselves with peers or friends who were perceived by them and by others to be bullies. From their perspective, the bully was considered to have a bigger social circle, more popular or physically stronger. 28.5% of the sample considered themselves to be socially selective; therefore, they neither associated themselves with bullies nor had friends who were connected to bullying activities.

RQ 3: Remaining silent versus reporting cyberbullying

If you ever witnessed cyberbullying across social media platforms, how did you respond?	N	%
1-Express my opinion actively	32	16%
2-Join in verbally	8	4%
3-Do nothing	54	27%
4-Leave the platform (log out)	27	13.5%
5-Object to the act of cyberbullying	21	10.5%
6- Reach out to the victim	23	11.5%
7- Report the incident	74	37%
8- I have never witnessed	19	9.5%

Figure 7. Students’ viewpoints and attitudes towards cyberbullying

One of the primary research questions pertained to how students responded to cyberbullying. The results significantly showed that over a third of the sample 37% would report the incident to someone and 27% would prefer to simply do nothing and just log out or escape from the platform in order not to exacerbate the problem. When students witnessed cyberbullying, a small proportion of the sample (4%) got involved and joined in verbally with no feelings of remorse or pity for the victim. This result warrants our attention, as a third of the study sample have reported that they prefer to simply turn into passive audiences, bystanders, or even bullies themselves.

In your opinion, why do people cyberbully others?	N	%
1- Out of boredom	34	17%
2- To become popular	45	22.5%
3- A defence mechanism for their own insecurities	80	40%
4- They have personal issues and frustrations	88	44%
5- Other reasons	15	7.5%

Figure 8. Reasons for cyberbullying from respondents’ viewpoints

To the question “why do people cyberbully?”, the respondents cited “personal frustrations”, “insecurities”, and “as a defence mechanism” as the most prominent reasons. Becoming popular and notorious was also relatable to the respondents who mentioned later that some bullies perceived their behaviour to be “fun” and “cool” without acknowledging it to be harmful. The respondents, who hailed from an array of Arab cultures, viewed this as a common and normal behaviour during different transitional periods.

RQ 4: Do students prefer to remain silent after being cyberbullied or do they report such incidents?

The majority (47.6%) found reporting cyberbullying to be very upsetting and reported that action needed to be taken. 33% felt that what happened online needed to remain online and not taken further. 19.5% felt that they should just cope with the situation and not make “a big deal “out of it. Thus, concerning deactivating social media accounts because of cyberbullying, 84.6% said “no” and refused to limit their use of social media platforms or deactivate any of their accounts. Results indicated that 39.1% would act and report the account of a bully and 29.9% would do the exact opposite; remain passive and totally ignore the situation. 18.3% would actively engage in a verbal confrontation with the bully, partially due to cultural and environmental factors surrounding both the bully and the victim.

Describe your response to cyberbullying:	N	%
1- I ignore the situation	59	29.9%
2- I change the social media platform	9	4.6%
3- I respond to the bully	36	18.3%
4- I confide in a friend	16	8.1%
5- I report the account of the bully	77	39.1%
Missing	18	

Figure 9. Respondents' reaction to cyberbullying

A significant finding concerns the confidence of bullying victims. Two-thirds of the sample (60.5%) would prefer to confide in a friend about cyberbullying incidents rather than telling a family member. This result is extremely crucial as friends and peers have a strong influence on youth's emotional, behavioural, and affective development and can help reduce the anxiety levels associated with cyberbullying. Friends can also help cyberbullying victims by providing protection and coping advice. This result is consistent with that of previous studies conducted on bullying emphasising the role of friends and peer groups in overcoming the negative impact of real-life bullying. (Bukowski, 2001; Jeffrey et al., 2001) Despite the consistency of results, the issue of cyberbullying remains and troubles the teens and youth in different societies. A real concern pertains to the mental health and psychological welfare of 14% of the respondents who chose to remain passive and fall into a spiral of silence rather than taking positive actions.

An important issue worth noting is the reluctance of students (14%) in reporting cyberbullying incidents to adult figures or academic counsellors. Most of them stated that they feared getting

into trouble. Others felt that if they escalated the problem, the bully (if identified) would probably retaliate later. Perceiving their professors and counsellors a part of the educational system, they feared blame and claimed no one could do anything to stop it from happening. Such tendencies and beliefs underly a sense of low self-esteem and disbelief in themselves and others. Furthermore, concerning reporting cyberbullying to the police or the authorities, only 8.2% were active and reported incidents of cyberbullying. A clear majority of 91.8% chose never to report or speak up about cyberbullying. This finding explains why respondents are apprehensive and what makes cyberbullying harder to combat.

If you have told someone about cyberbullying, that person will be	N	%
1- A Friend	121	60.5%
2- A Professor	3	1.5%
3- An academic counsellor	3	1.5%
4- Your Parent	34	17 %
5- Your sibling	38	19 %
6- Nobody	28	14%

Figure 10. Confiding in someone about cyberbullying

As results indicate below in Figure 11, a general perception exists amongst the study sample (92.3%) that social media needs to witness more kindness and tolerance instead of turning into bullying platforms where harassment occurs at different levels. Freedom of speech doesn't entitle one to have the right to violate other people's lives.

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cyberbullying is normal in the world of social media.	16	8.8%	19	10.4%	23	12,6%	73	40.1%	51	28.0%
People who are bullied should respond instead of not doing anything.	10	5.5%	14	7.7%	39	21.4%	54	29.7%	65	35.7%
If someone is being cyberbullied, it is important to inform an adult.	3	1.6%	7	3.8%	25	13.7%	67	36.8%	80	44.0%
I would like to witness more kindness and respect on social media.	3	1.6%	0	0%	11	6.0%	51	28.0%	117	64.3%
I would report being cyberbullied	12	6.6%	13	7.1%	45	24.7%	66	36.3%	46	25.3%
I consider myself to be a very social person, with many friends.	8	4.4%	19	10.4%	54	29.7%	64	35.2%	37	20.3%

There are effective ways to stop cyberbullying.	1	0.5%	17	9.3%	24	13.2%	81	44.5%	59	32.4%
I would like to see more strict laws dealing with cyberbullies.	2	1.1%	4	2.2%	18	9.9%	57	31.3%	101	55.5%
Cyberbullying online is the same as offline (real world).	9	4.9%	27	14.8%	29	15.9%	46	25.3%	71	39.0%
Cyberbullying is a crime like any other crime.	3	1.6%	8	4.4%	23	12.6%	61	33.5%	87	47.8%
Cyberbullies should be punished.	2	1.1%	10	5.5%	12	6.6%	60	33.0%	98	53.8%

Figure 11. Respondents viewpoints regarding cyberbullying

Moreover, anonymity is a unique characteristic of technology that works well for bullies but against victims. It enables the protection of bullies by concealing their identity and leaving the victims vulnerable. The results also indicate that one in four (25.4%) would report being cyberbullied, which raises much concern. People don't report cyberbullying or consider it "normal", as they don't believe anyone can do anything about it. A similar finding was also stated in a previous research study conducted by Li (2007). Such tendencies could arise from the fear of infringement of privacy with regards to electronic device use or concerns that the

device could be confiscated by an adult (Mishna, Saini & Solomon, 2009).

Another significant result is that cyberbullying should not be normalised as human behaviour. On the contrary, it should be criminalised and considered as any other harmful/illegal human behaviour. 47.8% of the sample strongly believe that cyberbullying is just like any other crime and should be subject to stricter legal sanctions. Reporting incidents to the police and legal authorities can help prevent cyberbullying. Creating online reporting systems (in addition to offline channels) can also assist in handling the existing cyberbullying cases effectively by identifying the perpetrators and helping the victims. Cyberbullying has been identified to be a closely related factor leading to low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration, and a variety of other emotional and psychological problems (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). In congruence with the finding of Campbell et al. (2013) concerning the impact of cyberbullying on the perpetrator, this paper agrees that bullies cause self-harm and inflict it upon others. Therefore, counselling and seeking mental help should be considered as a possible remedial intervention for both bullies and victims.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that the youth today have changed radically due to the rapid transformation and diffusion of technology. As technology is an integral part of their lives, restricting access to such platforms will profoundly affect them. These effects need to be taken into consideration when formulating strategies for the prevention and intervention of cyberbullying.

An important aspect for consideration is that the degree of severity of cyberbullying, like traditional bullying, can have short-, medium-, and long-term effects on victims. To help victims of cyberbullying, they should be able to reach out for help without feeling scared or intimidated by any consequences. Faculty and staff of educational institutions can hold seminars or sessions to educate children and youth on the negative impacts of cyberbullying. These should not be one-time awareness sessions, rather comprehensive, detailed programs to help combat cyberbullying. Counselling is also a remedial approach to help victims of cyberbullying.

Confidentiality is also an important element likely to decrease the silence taboo. Establishing a hotline or a mobile application can provide alternatives to victims to voice themselves and report any incidents of online bullying.

Bystanders also have the potential to make a positive difference in bullying situations. They are essential for the prevention, intervention, and reduction of online bullying situations. Their role can be shifted to becoming upstanders and taking positive actions in bullying situations. They can address the situation by defending the target victim of bullying, objecting to the bullying behaviour, validating the victim's views, or intervening in the situation as an online group. This study supports the role bystanders can play in reducing incidents of cyberbullying.

Aggressors should also be targets of educational and professional attention to rectify their toxic behaviours. Victims of bullying and cyberbullying should receive emotional and psychological help. The need for such interventions was evident in the responses to the open-ended questions where a considerable

percentage of the sample (23%) expressed willingness to undergo in-depth interviews relating to their personal experiences with verbal, physical, and online bullying. Thus, further investigation is needed in this area based on the results of this study.

Additionally, technologies need to be monitored and modified to manage cyberbullying and enable the direct-reporting of any bullying incidents; therefore, more attention needs to be given towards promoting the responsible use of technology. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter should adopt control measures to ensure safe user experience of social media and filter offensive comments or hate speech.

The efforts to combat cyberbullying should include prevention and intervention programs at the community, school, and family levels. Professional counselling and mental help should be considered as proactive measures that need to be more culturally and socially accepted in Arab societies. Government authorities should also pay more attention to problems that youth encounter when using social media networks, with stricter measures on those who violate internet policies.

This paper supports the importance of conducting more research to investigate further the different types of bullying that are unexplored due to the cultural and social factors in many Arab countries. Despite the UAE's having a transparent policy in place and being one of the first countries to establish a unit in its police departments for cybercrimes, victims need to be further encouraged to report any acts of bullying that can affect their psychological or mental health. As proposed by this study, further qualitative

research is required to assess the socio-psychological impacts of cyberbullying on victims in conservative societies.

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