

Chapter 11

Cyberbullying Among Malaysian Children Based on Research Evidence

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have highlighted that the internet offers various online opportunities to users, for example, children, and that the internet possesses great potential to boost their education and provide health information. Scholars have emphasized the great utility of the internet in successfully raising awareness regarding children's online safety issues and enhancing social relationships. However, despite the positive effects of the internet, it has negative effects as well. Nowadays, children and adolescents are increasingly using the internet at younger ages, through diverse platforms and devices, and there have been rising concerns about children's safety online. The chapter investigated the level of cyberbullying among Malaysian children and discovered that the level of cyberbullying among Malaysian children is moderate. However, since the results of the study found a majority of the children surveyed had experienced cyberbullying at least once, there is a likelihood that cyberbullying could become a menace to the Malaysian child online.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet, a technology that cuts across geographical borders and overcomes the challenges of time is considered the most influential technological development in the 21st Century (Dholakia & Kshetri 2004). It has been described as the modern Pandora's Box that has opened a new cyberspace of threats to unwary users (Ktoridou, Eteokleous & Zachariadou 2012). Given the broad use and the rapid sophistication of the cyber technology over the years, the Internet is gradually replacing conventional (traditional) media of communication and becoming not only a new means communication but also a new means of interaction and socialization for millions of users nowadays (Ktoridou et al. 2012).

Rapid innovative advancements in the cyber technology and cyber-related technologies have exceptionally augmented the capacity and categories of users over the decades. According to Dholakia and Kshetri (2004), the Internet took only three years to reach 50 million users around the world compared to the 13 years taken by the radio and 38 years by the television. Approximately 2.9 billion people all over the world have access to the Internet, representing around 41% of the world population, and this number continues to increase (Kenda 2014).

The cyberspace is rapidly becoming a medium for people to meet their everyday needs like searching for information, communicating and entertainment (University of Southern California, [USC] Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future [ASCDF], 2008). The cyberspace has certainly provided enormous benefits and advantages to the people (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin 2005). A meta-analysis study by Guan and Subrahmanyam (2009) has found that the cyber technology is a useful tool for promoting youth cognitive, social and physical development. In addition, scholars have emphasised the great utility of the Internet in successfully raising awareness regarding health issues, enhancing social relationships, maintaining community links among the young people and numerous other benefits (Barak & Sadovsky 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Flicker, Maley, Ridgley, Biscope, Lambardo & Skinner 2008).

Despite the positive effects of the cyberspace on users, the technology exerts some negative influences as well (e.g., cyberbullying), especially on children and the youth (Livingstone, 2012). Nowadays, Malaysian children and adolescents are increasingly using cyber technology at younger ages, with diverse devices and technologies (Balakrishnan 2015). In recent years however, there has been growing concern by the public, schools and parents about children and youth involvement in online risk behaviors such as cyberbullying and harassment (Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak 2000; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2006). Many Malaysian youth and children have been exposed on daily basis to numerous Internet risks and harms (Balakrishnan 2015).

Given the ease of access and use of Internet technologies, even children learn how to use it; some children even go to the extent of protecting their online privacy from the prowling eyes of their parents (Yusuf, Osman, Hassan & Teimoury 2014). With just a click on the keyboard/keypad, children can access almost anything, including any kind of video, article and image they desire, including what they might stumble across accidentally (Balakrishnan 2015; Ktoridou et al. 2012), which often leads to incidences of cyberbullying, where children are being bullied by others while online (Yusuf et al. 2014).

This suggests that cyberbullying has been posing growing concern, especially for the online safety of the youth and children. Furthermore, there have been significant and rapid changes in children and youth's online activities in the last one decade in the country (Balakrishnan 2015; Yusuf et al. 2014). Evidently, there has been remarkable increase in the use of smartphones by the youngsters coupled with their migration from social activity to social networking sites across societies in the world (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2012) and in Malaysia (Abu Bakar 2013; Balakrishnan 2015).

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