Chapter 9
Neuropsychological Impact of Cyber Victimisation in Females

Asmita Gaur

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2744-2904
Maastricht University, The Netherlands

Smriti Maini

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8947-6897
IILM Institute for Higher Education, India

ABSTRACT

Cyber victimization is a phenomenon where people are subjected to cyber bullying through online harassment, exposure to unsolicited sexual content, and hurtful comments. This phenomenon is said to induce embarrassment, traumatic experiences, and in severe cases, psychopathological cascades. Social withdrawal, shame, and social anxiety are commonly witnessed in victims of cyber bullying. According to previous research and substantiated theories, women are more commonly the victims of online abuse. In such a scenario, a discussion regarding clear definition of cyber victimization, social media addiction processes, prevalence of gender differences, and effects of cyber victimization is important. This chapter aims to review all these relevant topics and discuss neuropsychological mechanisms underlying these processes.

INTRODUCTION

A female in her late adolescent years went through an agonizing experience online where she was bullied based on her appearance and identity, publicly being regularly taunted and was constantly told to commit suicide. Fortunately, the girl shared about her experiences with concerned authorities and sought help in the right time. (A Personal anecdote shared by a victim of cyber bullying.)

A young adult, university going student was subjected to online hate and exposed to revengeful and unwanted sexual content after rejecting a classmate's romantic proposal. She was bombarded with hateful abusive names after rejecting the boy's advances and was character shamed by her peers subsequently.

The girl faced severe post-traumatic stress and social anxiety after the incident but slowly after seeking psychological help, recovered and today works as a successful PhD candidate at a renowned university. She describes her experiences as embarrassing and guilt inducing when she recalls her past trauma. (A Personal anecdote shared by victim of cyber bullying.)

Such experiences induce deep psychological impact on the victim's psyche and life. In recent times with increased engagement in digital platforms, the risk of being cyber victimized gets invariably high. Social media platforms allow users to provide personal information to their audience which raises the likelihood of being exploited. The term *cyber victimization* refers to encountering violent conduct or behavior through technology for communication and information, including the internet, video games, and mobile phones (Wright & Wachs, 2020). Cyber victimization involves the victims being subjected to sexual solicitation and approaches, harassment, bullying, and unwanted exposure to sexual content (Finkelhor et al, 2005), because of such experience's trauma, embarrassment and guilt can be induced in the victim. It effects a person's self-concept, self-esteem in a profound manner. In this chapter we'd explain sub themes important in context of psychological effects of cyber victimization and its neurological underpinnings. We have used the term neuropsychological to explain certain phenomena instead of solely neurological as both underpinnings work together to create certain behaviours as reactions to traumatic events like being a victim of cyber bullying.

DEFINING CYBER VICTIMIZATION

Cyber-victimization is defined as the harm suffered due to being a victim of cyberbullying including frequent undesirable, detrimental, abusing, and/or threatening interactions using electronic communication medium. (Corcoran et al., 2015). Being the target of offensive messages, harsh comments, embarrassing images, and threats via electronic messaging or social media are examples of cybervictimization. It is projected that between 9% and 22% of college students will become victims of cybercrime at some point (Sargent et al., 2016). Cyber victimization therefore can cause extreme distress in the lives of the individuals enduring cyber bullying. Online sextortion, non-consensual forwarding of sexts, and revenge porn are other types of online harassment that are frequently assessed to be distinct types of online abuse but could additionally be categorized as online sexual harassment (Buchanan & Mahoney, 2021). Such experiences are rooted in various gender differences to be discussed further in chapter.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A "DIGITAL DRUG"

Nowadays, social media can be equated to a digitalized drug. The term "social media addiction" entails three key characteristics: (a) being excessively concerned about one's social media presence, (b) being propelled by a strong desire to use social media, and (c) spending so much time and effort on social media that it negatively impacts other facets of life, such as social interactions, job or school, relationships, and general wellbeing (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). Adverse consequences are observed, including addiction, which is characterized by a need to be noticed, mood swings, spending too much time on social media, withholding oneself from their environment, and engaging in interpersonal confrontations. Social media and other communication platforms are considered as an addictive platform due its permanence in availability, communication with no definite patterns of synchronicity and ease in usage, which is usually

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