



CYBERBULLYING AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHERS' CONFIDENCE, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND WELL BEING

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

This study explores the repercussions of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence, academic performance, and overall well-being within the context of private schools. With the escalating prevalence of cyberbullying incidents, particularly affecting educators, the research aims to assess its influence on a sample of 50 private school teachers. The data collection method involved employing a Likert scale-based survey to gather insights on the teachers' perceptions and experiences in dealing with cyberbullying. The collected data aims to shed light on the correlation between cyberbullying and teachers' confidence, academic performance, and well-being, providing valuable insights for addressing this pertinent issue in educational settings. This research contributes to the broader discourse on the challenges educators face in the digital age and underscores the importance of addressing cyberbullying for a healthier educational environment.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Educational discourse, Teachers Confidence, Academic Performance*

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, where technological advancements have brought about transformative changes, educators find themselves grappling with a new and insidious challenge – cyberbullying. This phenomenon extends beyond traditional classroom boundaries, infiltrating the digital realm where teachers, as guardians of knowledge, face a unique set of adversities. This study delves into the multifaceted impact of cyberbullying on teachers, exploring its repercussions on their confidence, academic performance, and overall well-being. In recent times, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an abrupt shift to online teaching, exposing educators to unprecedented challenges and vulnerabilities (Rajbhandari & Rana, 2022). The increased reliance on digital platforms for educational delivery during this period not only accentuated the role of technology in teaching but also intensified the prevalence of cyberbullying. Teachers, already navigating the complexities of adapting pedagogies to virtual environments, found themselves susceptible to online harassment, exacerbating the toll on their professional and personal lives. As educators globally grappled with the sudden shift to remote teaching during the pandemic, instances of cyberbullying witnessed a significant surge (Minor, et al., 2013). The anonymity afforded by online spaces, coupled with the blurring lines between personal and professional domains, created an environment where teachers became targets of unwarranted hostility. Consequently, this study recognizes the intertwining dynamics of cyberbullying and the seismic shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 era as crucial aspects that warrant comprehensive investigation.

Literature review

In June 2020 NCERT and UNESCO developed a booklet named "Safe online learning in the times of COVID-19" is a significant initiative aimed at raising awareness among students and teachers about online safety the booklet provides essential guidelines on safe internet usage, emphasizing the growing importance of maintaining a secure online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of educational institutions in India since March 20, 2020, due to the pandemic has led to a surge in online learning, exposing a large population, including teachers, to various digital platforms. This increased digital engagement has, in turn, heightened the vulnerability of adolescents to cyberbullying, as highlighted by data indicating a rise in online discrimination for children and young people. The booklet addresses the pressing concerns related to cyberbullying and underscores the need for a safe online learning environment. The comprehensive approach presented in the literature underscores the urgency of tackling cyberbullying issues, providing a valuable foundation for the proposed research on the impact of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence and well-being. As per a 2016 estimate by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), globally, one in three internet users is a child whereas, in India, the recent 'India Internet Report 2019' suggests that two in three internet users are between 12 and 29 years of age. The young age of this group of internet users often falls prey to online bullies due to their

psychological makeup. This has resulted in a spike in cyberbullying and harassment cases. As a matter of fact, in one year alone (2017-2018), cyberbullying of Indian women and teenagers rose by 36%. The problem is compounded by teachers' relative lack of technological sophistication compared to their pupils, the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators and the range of methods which have been used to cyber bully teachers. Obvious methods include setting up 'hate groups' on Facebook or MySpace, posting negative reviews on the *bête noire* of many teachers: Rate My Teacher, or sending abusive text messages. But there are other equally damaging methods such as hacking into a teacher's email account, sending viruses or using the school's own Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) to disrupt or delete a teacher's work. The survey highlighted the effects of cyber bullying upon teachers with 39% saying they suffered a blow to their confidence, 25% saying they felt the standard of their teaching was affected and 6% reporting that they were signed off work with stress or other related illness. Such statistics will be especially worrying to school leaders because they indicate a heightened risk of employment claims Eden, S., Heiman, T., & Olenik-Shemesh, D. (2012) in the research paper 'Teachers' perceptions, beliefs and concerns about Cyberbullying' addresses the emerging challenges faced by schools and teachers due to the rapid rise of cyberbullying. Its objective is to investigate the perspectives, beliefs, and concerns regarding cyberbullying among a diverse group of teachers. A total of 328 teachers, with a majority being female (88.4%) and representing various school types and professional focuses, were randomly selected. They completed a cyberbullying questionnaire, sharing their perceptions, personal experiences, and background information. The findings underscore that teachers recognize cyberbullying as a prevalent issue in their schools, emphasizing the need for urgent attention in three key areas: policy development, heightened awareness among the school team, and the provision of coping strategies for parents. Approximately half of the teachers reported instances where students complained of harassment through mobile phones and the Internet, with some teachers disclosing personal experiences of being cyberbullied. According to a study conducted in 2008 by Hinduja & Patchin, females are as Likely, if not more likely, to be involved in cyberbullying in their lifetime (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). This is believed to be due to the nature of cyberbullying and the Anonymity that the internet provides.

Research gap

The literature review highlights the growing concern of cyberbullying in the context of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While initiatives such as the booklet by NCERT and UNESCO address the need for online safety, the specific impact on teachers remains a research gap. The literature emphasizes the vulnerability of adolescents to cyberbullying, especially in India, where a significant proportion of internet users fall within the age group susceptible to online bullying. The lack of technological sophistication among teachers, coupled with the difficulty in identifying perpetrators and varied methods of cyberbullying, contributes to the problem. Existing studies, such as Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh (2012), recognize cyberbullying as a prevalent issue but focus on broader school perspectives. Notably, the impact on teachers' confidence, academic performance, and well-being has not been extensively explored. Understanding these specific dimensions is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms for teachers facing cyberbullying challenges. Additionally, the review suggests a need for updated research considering the evolving nature of cyberbullying and the increased reliance on digital platforms for education.

Objectives

1. To investigate the impact of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence levels in their professional roles.
2. To know the impact of cyberbullying incidents on teachers' ability to engage students academically.
3. To Explore the psychological and emotional well-being consequences of cyberbullying on teachers.
4. To Assess the effectiveness of integrating comprehensive cyberbullying education into university teacher education programs.

Methodology

Research design

This research work used a survey method to gather information from a group of teachers from private schools. The questionnaire was distributed to 50 teachers at private schools.

The age of the sample ranged from 23 to 54 with the mean of 35.7 years ($SD = 8.1$). Most of the participants hold a Bachelor of Education, while others hold master's degrees within their respective subjects. The number of seniority years ranged from 0 to 16 years with the mean of 8.56 years ($SD = 7.2$).

Tool and Tool Development

A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect data where respondents' agreement or disagreement with the items/ statements were recorded. The five response options ranged from "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree". Each statement was paired with a Likert scale range of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represents "Strongly Agree".

The questionnaire had fifteen questions in total. The first four questions were designed to assess the basic information about the teachers like their age, gender, degree, years of experience and grade level taught. Whereas the rest of the questions were specifically designed to assess a relationship among factors like cyberbullying, academic performance, teacher confidence wellbeing, school policies etc. The scoring of the questionnaire followed a 5-point Likert scale to analyze respondents' agreement or disagreement with the items/ statements. The five responses ranged from "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree".

Objective 1

1. To investigate the impact of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence levels in their professional roles.

The study utilized a 15-item questionnaire with responses on a 5-point Likert scale to assess teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying. The instrument demonstrated high internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.88. One specific index, "Teachers' confidence in managing cyberbullying problems," comprising four items, explored teachers' self-assurance in handling cyberbullying issues, despite a moderate alpha coefficient of 0.52. Despite this, we retained this section due to its intrinsic relevance to the overall questionnaire.

Objective 2

2. To know the impact of cyberbullying incidents on teachers' ability to engage students academically.

The questionnaire included an index focusing on "Teachers' concern about cyberbullying," encompassing six items. For instance, the statement "I am concerned about cyberbullying" gauged teachers' worry about the phenomenon. The internal reliability for this index was 0.80, indicating a strong consistency in measuring teachers' apprehension regarding cyberbullying.

Objective 3

3. To Explore the psychological and emotional well-being consequences of cyberbullying on teachers.

The study incorporated an index probing "Teachers' belief in the school's commitment to deal with cyberbullying," consisting of 10 items. Statements like "Schools should develop policies on cyberbullying" delved into teachers' perceptions of their institutions' commitment. This index exhibited robust internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.93, emphasizing the significance of teachers' beliefs in shaping school policies on cyberbullying.

Objective 4

4. To Assess the effectiveness of integrating comprehensive cyberbullying education into university teacher education programs.

Within the questionnaire, an index focusing on "Teachers' belief in the importance of learning about cyberbullying" included two items. For instance, the statement "I want to learn more about cyberbullying in a continuing education program" measured teachers' inclination towards furthering their understanding of cyberbullying. This index demonstrated a high internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.83, highlighting the importance teachers attribute to continuous education on this subject.

In summary, this research employs a comprehensive questionnaire to investigate the multifaceted impact of cyberbullying on teachers, addressing their confidence levels, academic engagement, psychological well-being, and coping mechanisms. The indices within the questionnaire, despite varying internal reliability coefficients, collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of teachers' experiences with cyberbullying.

Data analysis techniques

The following statistical techniques were used for the analysis of the data:

The raw scores obtained on the 5-point Likert scale questionnaires by the schoolteachers were tabulated separately and descriptive statistics comprising measures of central tendency like mean and measures of variability like standard deviation were calculated.

Discussion

Interpretation of results

Participants' responses were coded and analyzed according to the four indexes. The first index measures the impact of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence levels in their professional roles. Most of the teachers 65–72% strongly agreed or agreed that "Cyberbullying has negatively affected my confidence in fulfilling my professional role" and "Cyberbullying incidents have made me question my abilities as a teacher." The result indicates that cyberbullying has negatively affected their confidence in fulfilling their professional role. Additionally, a similar percentage expressed that cyberbullying incidents have made them question their abilities as teachers. These findings suggest a consistent and significant influence of cyberbullying on teachers' professional confidence, indicating the need for supportive measures and interventions in this aspect. ($M=4.05$, $SD = 0.71$)

Second index measured the Impact of cyberbullying incidents on teachers' ability to engage students academically. Notably, 70 - 86% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that "I find it challenging to engage students academically after experiencing cyberbullying" and "Cyberbullying incidents have impacted my ability to create a positive learning environment". This result indicates the high mean ($M=4.90$) and relatively low standard deviation ($SD=0.80$), the majority of teachers, find it challenging to engage students academically after experiencing cyberbullying. Additionally, a similar percentage expressed that cyberbullying incidents have negatively impacted their ability to create a positive learning environment. These findings suggest a consistent and substantial influence of cyberbullying on teachers' academic engagement and the overall classroom atmosphere.

Third index measured the psychological and emotional well-being consequences of cyberbullying on teachers. For example, most teachers agreed or strongly agreed 78-86% with the statement "Cyberbullying has led to increased stress and anxiety in my professional life" and "I have experienced emotional distress as a result of cyberbullying incidents". This result indicates a strong relation between cyberbullying and impact on their mental health ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 0.80$)

The fourth index measured teachers' belief in the importance of learning about cyberbullying. For example, most teachers agreed or strongly agreed (65–68%) with the statement “I want to learn more about cyberbullying in my university education,” and “I need tools to be prepared to manage cyberbullying.” The results indicated a strong belief by teachers that cyberbullying is an important issue and should be studied by teachers and educators ($M=3.69$, $SD=1.10$).

Implications and limitations of the study

Implications

This research holds significant implications for the field of education, urging a proactive response to the challenges posed by cyberbullying within private schools. By highlighting the potential impact on teachers' confidence, academic performance, and overall well-being, the study emphasizes the need for educational institutions to prioritize the development and implementation of targeted policies. These policies should not only address cyberbullying incidents but also integrate preventative measures and support systems. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of incorporating digital literacy and cyberbullying awareness into teacher training programs, equipping educators with the necessary skills to navigate the digital realm effectively. School leadership plays a pivotal role in creating a positive culture that actively addresses cyberbullying, requiring administrators to champion open communication, implement robust policies, and allocate resources for prevention and intervention. From a broader perspective, this research advocates collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to foster a safe online environment for teachers, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more secure educational landscape.

Limitations

This study, delving into the impacts of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence, academic performance, and overall well-being within private schools, presents valuable insights while also acknowledging certain limitations. The use of a sample limited to 50 private school teachers raises concerns about the generalizability of findings to a broader educator population. Additionally, the focus on private schools may limit the applicability of results to public school settings or diverse geographic regions. The Likert scale-based survey method employed, while efficient, introduces the potential for self-reporting bias, emphasizing the need for complementary methods to validate responses. The study's cross-sectional design provides a snapshot but precludes an exploration of temporal changes in cyberbullying dynamics. The research might benefit from a more extensive investigation into coping mechanisms employed by teachers and a deeper exploration of the influence of school culture on cyberbullying experiences. Furthermore, considering the rapidly evolving nature of technology, the study's findings may have a limited shelf life. Despite these limitations, this research significantly contributes to the discourse on educators' challenges in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of addressing cyberbullying for a healthier educational environment.

Conclusion

Summary of key findings

In conclusion, the findings of this research underscore the pervasive and detrimental impact of cyberbullying on teachers across multiple dimensions. The first index reveals a significant negative influence on teachers' confidence in fulfilling their professional roles, with a substantial percentage expressing doubts and questioning their abilities due to cyberbullying incidents. This highlights the urgent need for supportive measures and interventions to bolster teachers' confidence in the face of online harassment. The second index indicates a consistent and substantial effect on teachers' ability to engage students academically, suggesting that cyberbullying not only affects individual teachers but also has broader implications for the classroom environment. The third index demonstrates a strong association between cyberbullying and adverse psychological and emotional well-being consequences for teachers, emphasizing the toll it takes on their mental health. Lastly, the fourth index highlights teachers' recognition of the importance of learning about cyberbullying, signaling a clear call for educational institutions to address this issue in teacher training programs. Overall, these findings illuminate the pressing need for comprehensive strategies to combat cyberbullying and support the well-being of educators in order to create a conducive and healthy learning environment.

Contributions to the field

This research makes significant contributions to the field of education by shedding light on the often-overlooked issue of cyberbullying experienced by teachers. By examining its prevalence and various forms, the study aims to enhance awareness within the educational community. Moreover, the findings will inform the development of targeted policies and guidelines to create a safer working environment for teachers. Understanding the impact of cyberbullying on teachers' confidence, academic performance, and well-being provides crucial insights for the implementation of tailored professional development programs and support systems. The correlation between cyberbullying and academic performance can guide interventions to improve overall academic environments, ensuring educators can perform optimally. Additionally, by identifying coping mechanisms, the research empowers teachers, fostering resilience and control in the face of cyberbullying. Ultimately, this study offers a comprehensive framework for addressing cyberbullying in educational settings and encourages continued research in this important area.

Recommendations for future research

Future research in the realm of cyberbullying and its impact on teachers within private schools should encompass a more extensive and diverse sample, spanning various types of private educational institutions. Longitudinal studies are crucial for tracking the dynamic nature of technology and cyberbullying trends over time. Evaluating the effectiveness of intervention

strategies and policies, as well as exploring the role of support systems, both peer-based and administrative, can guide the development of evidence-based practices.

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