Understanding Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the use of digital platforms—such as social media, messaging apps, gaming forums, and other online spaces—to harass, threaten, or humiliate individuals. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can happen at any time, reach a larger audience quickly, and leave a lasting digital footprint. It can take various forms, including spreading false information, sharing private images without consent, or sending abusive messages.

National Data

With the rapid rise in internet usage and smartphone penetration in India, cyberbullying has become a growing concern, especially among young people. Studies indicate that:

- Over 37% of Indian teenagers have experienced cyberbullying, making India one of the top-ranked countries for online harassment among youth. (Source: Microsoft Global Youth Online Behavior Survey)
- A 2021 survey by Child Rights and You (CRY) found that over 50% of students aged 13-18 reported encountering some form of cyberbullying.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrime cases involving minors have been rising annually, with a 60% increase in cyberbullying complaints between 2019 and 2022.

The anonymity of the internet often emboldens bullies, making it harder for victims to seek help. Schools, parents, and policymakers must work together to raise awareness and create a safer digital environment for students.

Forms of Cyberbullying

- **Harassment:** Sending offensive, threatening, or persistent unwanted messages.

- **Impersonation:** Creating fake profiles to damage someone's reputation.

- **Cyberstalking:** Monitoring someone's online activities to intimidate or control them.

- **Exclusion:** Deliberately excluding someone from online groups or activities.

- **Doxing:** Publishing private information without consent, leading to harassment or harm.

- **Outing and Trickery:** Coercing someone into revealing personal information and sharing it publicly without their consent.

Impact of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has serious consequences on a person's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Some of the effects include:

Emotional Effects
- Victims may experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.
- Feelings of embarrassment, social withdrawal, and self-doubt.
- Increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts in extreme cases.

Physical Health
- Stress from cyberbullying can lead to headaches, sleep disturbances, and appetite loss.
- Long-term exposure to cyberbullying can weaken the immune system due to chronic stress.

Academic Consequences
- Victims may face difficulty concentrating in school.
- Declining grades and academic performance.
- Increased school absenteeism due to fear of facing peers.

▷▷ Legal Framework in India

India has several laws in place to combat cyberbullying and ensure digital safety:

- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** This law covers cybercrime-related offences, including online harassment, identity theft, and defamation.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860:** Sections of the IPC that apply to cyberbullying include:
  - Section 507: Criminal intimidation by anonymous communication.
  - Section 499 & 500: Criminal defamation.
  - Section 354D: Cyberstalking and harassment of women.
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO)** Act, 2012: Safeguards minors from online exploitation and abuse.

Victims of cyberbullying can file complaints with the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (cybercrime.gov.in) or approach local law enforcement agencies.

⏵⏵ Prevention and Response Strategies

For Students

- **Privacy Settings:** Regularly update and manage privacy settings on social media to control who can view your content.

- **Think Before Sharing**: Avoid sharing personal information, sensitive photos, or private conversations online.

- **Report and Block:** Immediately report any cyberbullying incidents to the respective platform and block the offender.

- **Speak Up:** Inform parents, teachers, or school authorities if you or a friend is being cyberbullied.

- **Avoid Retaliation:** Do not respond aggressively to a cyberbully, as it can escalate the situation.

- **Be Mindful of Your Actions:** Avoid posting or sharing content that may unintentionally hurt someone. Do not engage in spreading rumors or making fun of others online.

⏵ For Families and Peers

- **Monitor Online Activity:** Parents should stay informed about their child's digital presence without violating their privacy.

- **Encourage Open Conversations:** Discuss online experiences and concerns regularly.

- **Set Digital Boundaries:** Establish rules about internet usage, screen time, and acceptable online behaviour.

- **Teach Empathy:** Educate children on how their words and actions can impact others.

- **Support the Victim:** If a peer or family member is cyberbullied, stand up for them and help report the abuse.

▷▷ For Teachers and Institutions

- **Awareness Programs:** Conduct regular workshops for students on responsible internet usage and the risks of cyberbullying.

- **Open Communication:** Encourage students to report any form of online harassment.

- **School Policies:** Implement strict policies on cyberbullying and establish clear consequences for offenders.

- **Cyberbullying Cells**: Schools and institutions should establish dedicated cyberbullying response teams to handle cases effectively.

▷▷ Social Media Platform

Do's

- Use privacy settings.
- Regularly update passwords.
- Enable two-factor authentication (2FA).
- Review tagged content.
- Report abuse.
- Log out on shared devices.
- Limit app permissions.

Dont's

- Don't accept unknown friend requests.
- Don't share sensitive information.
- Don't use default privacy settings.
- Don't click suspicious links.
- Don't use predictable passwords.

▶▶ Email Account

Do's

- Use a professional email for official work.
- Verify email senders.
- Mark spam.
- Use encryption.
- Secure recovery options

Dont's

- Don't open unknown attachments.
- Don't respond to phishing emails.
- Don't reuse passwords.
- Don't click "unsubscribe" in spam emails.
- Don't share email credentials.

▶▶ Computer, Laptops & Mobiles

Do's

- Install antivirus software.
- Keep software & OS updated.
- Use secure networks.
- Backup data regularly.
- Clear cache and cookies.
- Lock your device.
- Update apps & use trusted apps.
- Review app permissions.
- Enable remote wipe.

Dont's

- Don't ignore security warnings.
- Don't use outdated software.
- Don't disable firewalls.
- Don't share computers for sensitive work.
- Don't install unknown software.
- Don't use open Wi-Fi networks.
- Don't skip device updates.
- Don't jailbreak or root your phone.
- Don't store passwords in plain text.

Treat others as you want to be treated

- **Post Don't Disappear -** Once something is online, it's hard to erase it. Think before you post — words can have long-lasting impact.

- **Fake Account Nightmare -** Dangers of impersonation and remind them to report fake accounts immediately.

- **Legal Consequences -** Cyberbullying isn't just mean — it can have real-world legal consequences. Be aware of laws and respect boundaries.

- **Metadata Revenge -** People think they're anonymous but technology leaves a trail. Think twice before using media for harmful purposes.

- **'Invisible Screenshot'** - 'Temporary' or 'Disappearing' features on social media aren't foolproof.

- **Deepfake** – Responsible use of AI Tools
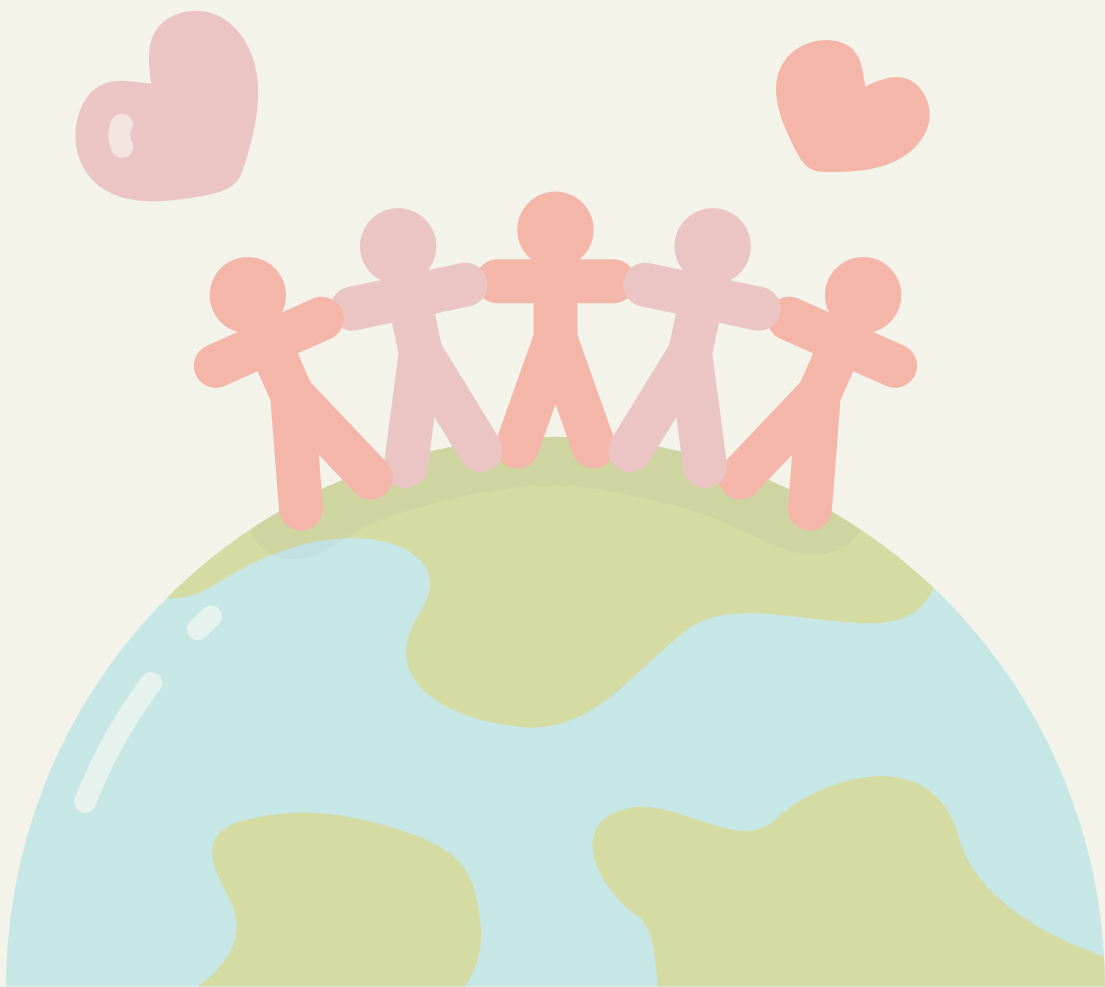
Resources and Support

Reporting Cyberbullying

- National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal: cybercrime.gov.in – Platform to report cybercrimes.
- Cyber Crime Helpline Number: 1930 – Toll-free helpline to report cybercrimes in India.

Support Organizations

- CyberDost (Ministry of Home Affairs Initiative): Provides safety tips and awareness programs. Website
- Childline India (1098): 24/7 helpline offering support to children in distress.

Educational Platforms

- Google's Be Internet Awesome: Online resources for safe internet practices.
- NCERT Cyber Safety Guidelines: Digital safety curriculum for schools.

About the author:

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At 15 I visited an exhibition called "Brush of Hope". It showcased the mental health journey of a victim of cyberbullying.

This visit was an eye opener. Not only did I not have any resources to combat cyberbullying, but none of my peers had any either. This is when I started a conversation on the topic in my school. What started with a panel discussion, opened up a plethora of cases which go unheard. My peers shared stories that ranged from surprising to downright shocking. I knew what I had to do.

I started holding more conversations across my city, Mumbai. So far, I have reached 1.5 thousand children and school teachers in awareness sessions online and in person. My vision with this initiative is to not only start conversations but also empower youngsters to take action and curb this evil for themselves and others.

My immediate goal with this initiative is to ensure that each educational institution has a systemic safe space for children to reach out, file complaints and seek help.

All the sessions, brochures and this book will contain contacts and resources for anyone to access if they find themselves in a position where they or their friends are getting cyberbullied. I hope my initiative skills scales and we together can eradicate this evil once and for all.