

# CYBERBULLYING: UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SITUATIONS

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*In 2012, Amanda Todd who lived in Canada committed suicide at the age of 15 due to cyberbullying. She was introduced to an anonymous person on Facebook who flattered her so much to the point of convincing her to flash her topless body to him. A year later, the same person or another anonymous person sent her the picture and it went viral, creating a mass of bullying and teasing on the internet to the point that she could not cope with the depression, and eventually she committed suicide (The Huffington Post, 10 Nov 2012).*

Likewise, in 2013, a 15-year-old boy from Ireland named Joshua Unsworth took his own life after frequent cyberbullying on a social network site. He was teased about his father being a farmer and peers made fun of his dating habits. This constant barrage of bullying lead to depression and suicide (Daily Mail, 7 April 2013).

The above-mentioned tragedies were not isolated cases. The acts of cyberbullying are increasing in every corner of the world. It is taking its place through different countries with Malaysia being one of them. Suicidal case due to cyberbullying rarely occurs in Malaysia, however, it might result in negative consequences to cyber users, such as depression and embarrassment, if it is not prevented from the beginning.

According to the latest data, a total of 389 cases of cyberbullying were reported in 2013. This number has increased 55.6% compared to 250 cases in 2012 (Sinar Harian, 24 Feb 2014). However, this statistical number is not sufficient to reflect the real situation of cyberbullying in Malaysia. Due to the scarcity of research concerning cyber bullying in Malaysia, the quantitative and qualitative information on this issue is almost invisible in the literature. It is believed that the real number of cyberbullying incidents is much higher than the reported cases. One of the possible reasons to explain why the victims of cyberbullying silenced themselves might be that the victims feel depressed, embarrassed, helpless, and they do not know the proper channel to report the cyberbullying incidents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Since many aspects of cyberbullying in Malaysia remain unknown, many questions arise. For example, which gender group (male or female cyber users) is commonly bullied electronically? What percentages of cyber users engaged in cyber bullies or have been bullied electronically? What are the factors that cause cyberbullying? What are the impacts of cyber bullying on Malaysian, especially among the adolescence who do not know how to deal with cyberbullying. Those questions are closely related to the youths in Malaysia for at least three reasons. First, we are confident to assume that majority of the youths are computer and internet literate due to the prevalence of mobile technology. Therefore, they can be considered as cyber users who might unintentionally and unconsciously engaged in cyberbullying. Second, the youths can easily and freely access to internet and computer facilities because schools, colleges and universities are usually equipped with those facilities for free. Furthermore, a lot of places, such as shopping malls, governmental and private agencies, and so forth provide free internet access for the public as well. This might provide a higher chance for the youth to expose themselves to the

world of cyber, and thereby increasing their chance to cyberbullying. Third, the mode of learning has been shifted from traditional learning method to web-based learning and mobile learning strategies. These changes require adolescents to use computer and internet technology for a longer time and more frequently. This reflects the fact that adolescents in college and university are the main contributor to the percentage of cyber users. Owing to these justifications, the Malaysian youths are worthwhile to be investigated concerning the issue of cyberbullying.

Taken together, this research was conducted to study the current situation about cyberbullying among youths in Malaysia. In addition, this research also aims at determining the influential factors and effects of cyberbullying on Malaysian youths.

## OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

This research project was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To determine the percentage of cyber bullies and being bullied according to demographic data (e.g., race).
- (ii) To find out which gender group (male or female) is usually targeted as victims of cyberbullying.
- (iii) To identify the common types of cyberbullying tactic.
- (iv) To identify the common platforms of cyberbullying (e.g., facebook, email, SMS, whastapp etc).
- (v) To determine the factors that cause cyberbullying among youth.
- (vi) To determine the effects of cyberbullying on youth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has been regarded as one of the major problems among youth in the cyber age. In general, cyberbullying can be defined as any cruel act to another cyber user by sending or posting hurtful materials (e.g., pornographic text, photo, and video) or using other means of social aggression through internet or any other digital technologies (Willard, 2006). Cyberbullying is an act of attack based on deliberately insulting, sending or posting harmful materials, threatening, harassing, hate group recruitment, cruel text, embarrassing another person using images or videos, and all these actions may occur on personal websites or it may be transmitted via social media sites, online chat room, e-mail, instant messenger, or cell phones application (Bosse & Stam, 2011 & Potha & Maragoudakis, 2014). Cyberbullying occur not only when children are at home, but also during school. Many schools have taken pragmatic steps to prevent cyber bullies to bully other students by installing filtering software in the school computers. According to Calvete et al., (2010) cyberbullying is significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to violence and less perceived social support of friends. Other reasons for cyberbullying might be attributed to disability, religion, gender, and anger. In this internet era, cyber bully problem becomes even more challenging because cyber bullies often use anonymous identity which is difficult to be traced (Nektaria & Manolis, 2014).

Similar to traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying is often upsetting and damaging, but it can be even more frightening due to the anonymous nature of the attack (Dianne & Sidney, 2008). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009) and Kowalski, Limber, and Agatson (2008), the theoretical model that can possibly explain cyberbullying is disinhibited behavioral effect on the Internet. Disinhibition means that normal behavioral restraint can become lost or disregarded (Mason, 2008). Within cyberspace context, cyber users might be lacking social, contextual and affective skills than in face-to-face communication. In addition, they are less sensitive and remorseful for the types of behaviors that they exhibit (Mason, 2008). This might be the reason to explain why cyberbullying occur intentionally or unintentionally. In cyberbullying, perpetrators have no direct social disapproval and punishment for engaging in bullying others and do not see that victim suffer (Willard, 2007). As a consequence, their behaviors are often disinhibited and gradually become ruder, harsher and even more difficult to control (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

### Types Of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a type of bullying that takes place on internet using electronic technology. Previously, online technology is only related to desktop or laptop. Nowadays, both desktop and laptop are not the only electronic products that can be connected to internet. The advance of mobile phones with smart features make it possible to receive and send information quickly and to surf internet websites easily by connecting to Wi-Fi. This change of technology indicates that cyberbullying does not only occur on internet websites using computer technology, but also on mobile phone applications.

Some research findings revealed that cyberbullying is more common in a range of more specific media. According to Smith et al., (2008), the most common media of cyberbullying are picture/video clip, e-mails, chatroom, instant messaging, mobile phone calls, text message and websites. It is important to note that the new forms of the cyberbullying emerge due to the advancement of internet technology.

Cyberbullying may exist in many forms. For instance, cyberharassment is one form of the cyberbullying that using vulgar and sexual wording to communicate to others (Haber & Daley, 2011). While according to Willard (2006), there are eight categories of cyberbullying, namely, flaming, online harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, exclusion, outing, trickery, impersonation, and masquerade which are to some extent independent of the media used. Apart from that, River and Noret (2010) claim that cyberbullying is composed of ten categories, namely, name calling, sexual acts, threat of physical violence, threats to damage existing, abusive or hate-related, death threats, menacing chain messages, ending of platonic relationships, demands/instructions, threats to home/family and relationships. New descriptive terms are created in cyberbully context, for example, 'sexting' is used to describe the act of circulating sexualised images on mobile phones or Internet without the person consent, 'trolling' is used to describe persistent offensive feedbacks or comments on a website, whereas 'grieving' is usually used to describe harassment of an individual in a virtual space. Figure 1 summarises different types of cyberbullying.

**Figure 1: Types of Cyberbullying**

Cyber harassment		Masquerading/Impersonation
Cyberbullying		Online grooming
Harassment by proxy		Outing
Denigration (Dissing)	Or	Plishing
Exclusion/Gossip Group		Sexting
Falsify identify		Trickey
Flaming		

According to Gordon (2015), not all cyberbullies are the same. In fact, they vary greatly one person to another. In Table 1 shows that each common type of cyberbullies with their own personalities and goals. Their target of cyberbully to the victims is vastly different.

**Table 1: Categories of Cyberbullies (Gordon, 2015)**

Types	Explanations
Status-Conscious cyberbullies	They are very confident and always condescending others and usually these cyberbullies have a group of followers or supporters. In the end they may feel like they had conquered the social media. Typically these cyberbullies are somebody with certain level of social-economic status or popularity. With their higher social status, they are able to control others and they tend to cyberbully others if they perceived that person as socially unacceptable.
Imposters	This type of cyberbully happened frequently in the popular circles of people. These people are hoping to ruin the victim's reputation. In general, this type of cyberbully occur by faking someone else's identity (imposter). Imposters usually set up a fake account pretending to be someone else and post a negative comment.
Internet Trolls/Haters	Internet troll or hater is a type of cyberbullies who are more aggressive. They usually use the social media sites or networking to troll the victims by spreading hate. The victims of this troll are typically made up of politicians, strangers, or celebrities. This type of cyberbullies will feel encouraged to continue cyberbullying when the victims respond to their mean comments.
Bully-Victims	This type of cyberbully is very common and often emerge after being cyberbullied by others. Usually their goal is to get back their power of control. A large number of youth that cyberbully others have been cyberbullied before. In fact, most of the bully-victims are either loner or in despair at their career path.
Accidental Cyberbullies	Accidental cyberbullies will never act as they are the cyberbully. They presume that they are just protecting themselves from being insulted/bullied by others when they respond or react negatively to some issues or topic of discussion on internet. Many people choose to remain silent, report to friends, or just block the user whenever they are confronted with cyberbullying. But for accidental cyberbullies, they often react impulsively and angrily. They tend to attack the one who cyberbully them with the same tactics. But in their mind, they perceive that they are the victims and they need to be protective by attacking back to those who bully them.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The convenient sampling method was used in this project in order to speed up the data collection process. Convenient sampling method is a respondent selection technique where the research subjects are selected due to their availability, willingness, and ease of access (Scheaffer, Mendenhall, & Ott, 1995). A total of 1406 respondents had answered the questionnaires. Of the total respondents, 634 are male (45.1%) and 772 are female (73.8%). The distribution of respondents according to zones is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents**

Zone	Frequency
Northern of Malaysia	310
Middle of Malaysia	227
Southern of Malaysia	199
East coast	274
Sarawak	177
Sabah	219
Total	1406

### Instrument

A self-development questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was concerning the demographic data of the respondents. Whereas, the second part consisted of 10 main items which were designed to measure different variables related to cyberbullying, such as common cyberbully platforms, common types of tactic used for cyberbullying, the impact of cyberbullying, and the reasons for engaging in cyberbullying. The selecting responses or tick boxes format was used in the questionnaire. The respondents were required to tick at box if s/he agrees with the statement in the item.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of data is performed according to the objectives of research. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data. Since the nature of the present research is descriptive, the discussion is merely focused on describing the collected data instead of explaining what happened behind those statistical figures.

### Percentage of Cyberbullies and Cyber Victims Based on Demographic Data

The first research objective was to find out the percentage of respondents who have experienced cyberbully and who have cyberbullied other cyber users. In general, a total of 530 respondents (37.7%) reported that they did not experience cyberbully, whereas, 876 respondents (62.3%) had been cyber bullied before.

In addition, we also found out that 67.5% of Malays community have experienced cyberbully which is the highest percentage compared to other ethnic groups. Sabahans have gained the lowest percentage score, only 48.1% have been cyberbullied. Table 3 shows the data of frequency and percentage of respondents who experienced cyberbullying based on ethnicity.

**Table 3: Table Percentage of Cyber Victims based on Ethnicity**

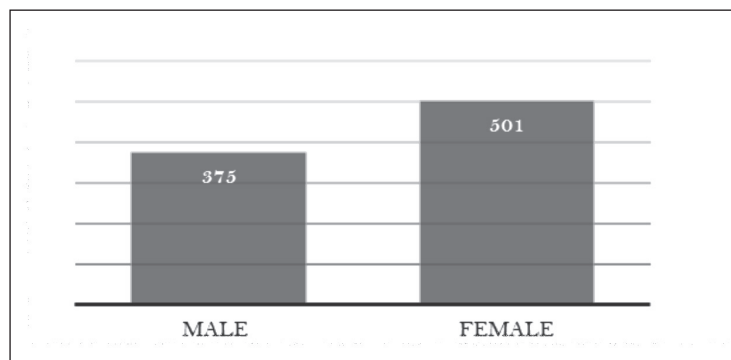
Ethnic	Had Not Been Cyber Bullied	Had Been Cyber Bullied
Malays	262 (32.5%)	543 (67.5%)
Chinese	87 (48.6%)	92 (51.4%)
Indian	64 (47.4%)	71 (52.6%)
Bumiputra Sarawak	67 (36.4%)	117 (63.6%)
Bumiputra Sabah	41 (51.9%)	38 (48.1%)

Apart from finding out the percentage of cyber victims, the present research also managed to discover the percentage of respondents who engaged in cyberbullying. The outcome of analysis shows that a total of 476 respondents (33.9%) have reported that they bullied other cyber users electronically. In detail, it is learned that 252 male (52.9%) and 224 female (47.1%) users cyberbullied other users.

### The Target Gender Group of Cyberbullying

The second objective was to find out which gender group, either male or female, is the main cyber victim. In the present study, it has been discovered that majority of female cyber users (501 female or 57.2%) have been bullied electronically. Compared to male cyber users, the percentage of male cyber victim was recorded as 375 or 42.8%, which is about 15% lower than female users. The data are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Male and Female Victims of Cyberbully**



Previous research findings are contradictory with regards to gender differences in cyberbullying victimisation. Some studies reported female cyber users are more likely to be cyber victims (Wang et al., 2009), whereas other studies found male cyber users are more often to be the victims of cyberbullying (Aricak et al., 2008). Conversely, some findings indicate that both female and male cyber users experienced cyberbullying equally.

Within the context of Malaysia, the results from the current research reveal that female cyber users have higher tendency to be cyberbullied compared to male users. Therefore, female cyber users must be warier when engaging in online activities on social media sites.

### Common Types of Cyberbullying Tactic

The third objective attempted to answer the question of what common types of cyberbullying tactic are. There are many ways of cyberbullying. One of the common ways is by spreading rumors of victim on social media.

The outcome of analysis shows that a total of 474 respondent (54.2%) have reported that they were cyberbullied by receiving rude or pornographic materials to the victims. A total of 47.8% of 429 respondents were cyberbullied by receiving hurtful nicknames and mocking or sarcastic languages were used to insult them. The third common types of cyberbullying tactic which accounts for 40.3% of 353 respondents, was through ignoring or boycotting by other cyber users on the online chatroom. Threatening victim on the internet is reported as the least common way of cyberbullying in which only 128 respondents (14.6%) have been threatened before on the internet. Spreading victim's message, photos, and video is also regarded as relatively uncommon compared to other means of cyberbullying.

Only 18.4% or 161 respondents reported that their message/photo/video have been misused by others. Table 4 shows the data concerning the types of cyberbullying tactic.

**Table 4: Common Types of Cyberbullying Tactic**

Tactics	Number of respondent	Percentage (%)
Giving hurtful nicknames/sarcastic language to victim	419	47.8
Sending vulgar/pornographic materials to victim	474	54.2
Ignore/boycott victim	353	40.3
Spreading rumors about victim	338	38.6
Spreading victim's message/photo/video	161	18.4
Using victim's password without her/his permission	272	31.1
Threaten victim on the internet	128	14.6

Within the context of the current research, the three most common ways of cyberbullying tactic have been discovered. The first, sending rude/offensive/pornographic materials is regarded as the most common way of cyberbullying. Offensive and pornographic materials can be either in form of photos, graphics, videos, or texts that cause uncomfortable or disgusted feelings to the receiver.

Another common technique of cyberbullying is by giving hurtful nickname and using mocking or sarcastic language to converse with other users. It is important to note that using vulgar language to mock other user might bring about very serious impacts, such as major depressive disorder and develop suicidal thought, on that user because not everybody is able to handle criticism and sarcasm.

The third common way to cyberbully other cyber users is through ignoring and boycotting other users on online chatroom/chat group. Many cyber users do not realise that ignoring someone on the chatroom or chat group can be considered as cyberbully. Such behavior can actually cause uncomfortable feelings to that user and, in turn, it might induce negative effect on that user.

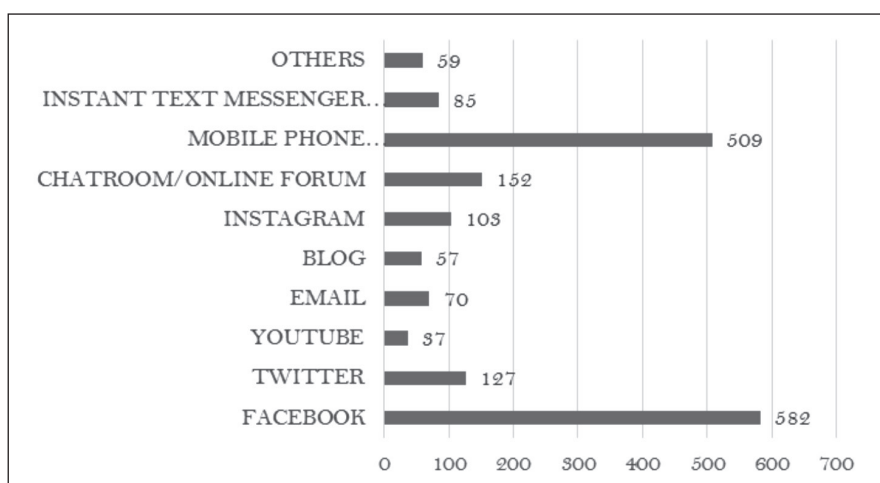
### Common Platforms of Cyberbullying

The fourth research objective was to find out the common platforms where cyberbullying took place. The current findings reveal that Facebook and mobile phone applications (e.g., wechat, telegram) are the most common platforms for cyberbullying. A total of 582 and 509 respondents admitted that they were bullied electronically via Facebook and mobile phone apps respectively. Figure 4.2 illustrates the details of the data.

Other platforms, such as Twitter, Youtube, Instagrams, online forum or chatroom, email, blog, and instant test messenger, have also been used for cyberbullying (see Figure 3). The results indicate that 127 respondents reported that cyberbullying occurred on Twitter, 103 and 152 respondents reported that they were bullied on Instagram and online chatroom respectively. Meanwhile, those who reported that they were bullied on Youtube, email, blog, instant test messenger, other platforms (e.g., gaming websites) were less than 100 respondents. Although the numbers are lower compared to Facebook and mobile phone apps, it might become a major platform fo cyberbullying if its use is not controlled and monitored.



**Figure 3: Common Platforms for Cyberbullying**



Numerous social media platforms have been used for social activities. Facebook and Twitter are two examples of social medias that have been widely used among youths in Malaysia (Leetaru et al., 2013; Mustafa et al., 2011). On the one hand, the use of social media allows the users to broaden their social and professional networks. However, on the other hand, it also exposes the users to the risk of cyberbullying.

In line with the previous findings (Salinas et al., 2013), the outcomes from this research also indicate that Facebook has been used as the primary platform for cyberbullying. The popularity of Facebook and its user friendly applications have attracted billions of users to socialise on Facebook. Facebook users can communicate flexibly with each other using text, photos, and video, and anyone can write comments about what have been posted on Facebook. These features have opened up its door to cyberbullying. Some Facebook users want to get positive comments from others by posting photos and videos, but that might be ending up with receiving harassing or insulting messages.

Besides Facebook, mobile phone apps, such as Wechat, and Telegram, have been commonly used a platform for cyberbullying as well. Similar to Facebook, the apps are usually used for socialising purpose through word, audio, or video chat. At the same time, photos and video can be posted on the apps and anybody can post comments on the posted materials. Likewise, this feature might invite cyberbullying.

Other platforms, such as Twitter, Blog, and Instagram, are not as common as Facebook and mobile phone apps, however, the users must be wary when using those social media sites.

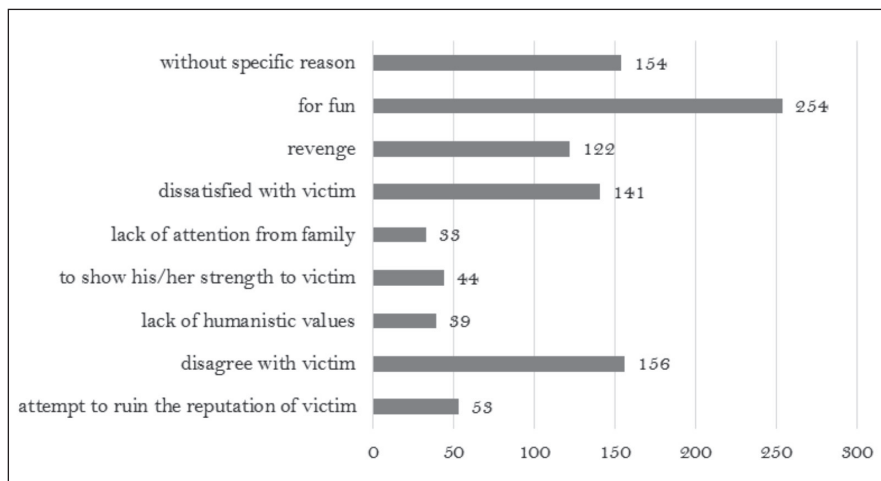
### **Factors that Cause Cyberbullying**

According to analysis results (refer Figure 4), it is surprising to find out that majority of the respondents (254 respondents) who were engaged in cyberbullying reported that they cyberbullied other cyber users merely to have fun or simply for entertainment purposes. Some other respondents did that without any specific reason. In addition, some respondents admitted that they cyberbullied other users due to disagreement on the topic of discussion, and revenge of other users.

Apart from the above mentioned major factors, there are other reasons for cyberbullies to engage in cyberbullying. A relatively small number of respondents (between 33 to 53 respondents) reported that their reasons for engaging in cyberbullying were because of lack of attention from family; to show their ego and strengths to other cyber users; lack of humanistic values, and attempt to ruin the reputation of other users.



**Figure 4: The Common Reasons for Cyberbullying Users**



The findings from this research reflect the fact that majority of the cyberbullies engage in cyberbullying is for entertainment purposes. They simply presume that it is fun and playful to bully other cyber users. Another major factor that sparks up cyberbullying is because of the bigotry of certain cyber users. When some cyber users (bigots) are debating with other users on certain issue, they tend to be intolerant towards those who hold different point of view from them, and thereby they begin to cyberbully those who disagree with them.

Some cyber users do not realise that it is not fun at all to bully other cyber users as it may cause serious problems to the victims. In this matter, educational institutions should play a more proactive role by taking initiative to educate the adolescents regarding the damaging impacts of cyberbullying on the victims. Besides, humanistic and moral values must be cultivated among adolescent as early as possible. The values of respect, ethics, and “agree to disagree” are specially vital for internet users.

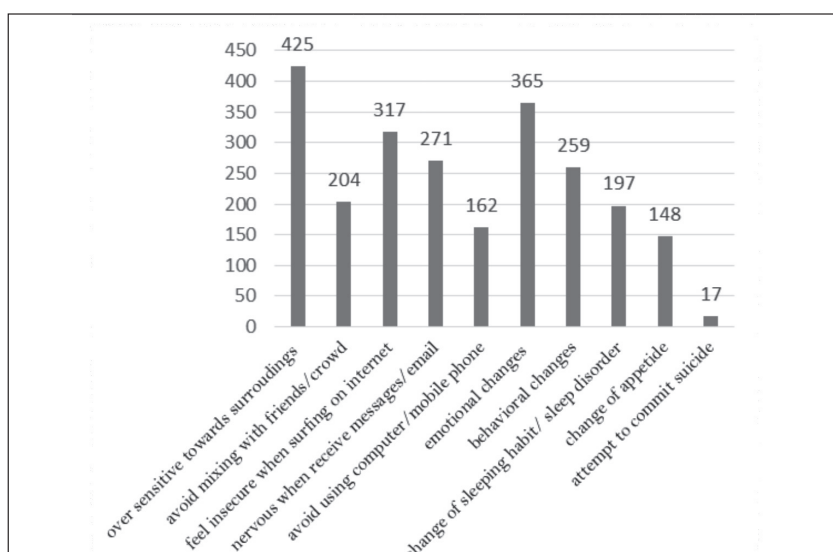
### Effects of Cyberbullying

The impact of being cyberbullied on the victims range from mild to severe effects. For instance, the mild effect can be the rejection or avoiding the use of internet or electronic gadgets. In a severe case, a cyber victim may develop suicidal thought which leads to an attempt to commit suicide (Cowie, 2013).

In the current research, it was discovered that majority of the cyber victims (425 respondents or 48.5% of total cyber victims) became over sensitive to their surroundings. The data are shown in Figure 5. Apart from that, there are 365 respondents (41.7% of total cyber victims) reported that they experienced emotional changes and another 317 respondents (36.2%) developed insecure feelings when surfing on internet. Another reported negative effects on the respondents are nervous when receiving messages and emails (271 respondents); behavioral changes (259 respondents); and avoiding mixing with family, friends, and crowd (204 respondents).

From the analysis output, it can be seen that the less common impact of cyberbullying are changes of sleeping habits or experiencing sleeping disorder, change of appetite, and avoid using computer or mobile phones. Also, a total of 17 respondents reported that they attempted to commit suicide.

**Figure 5: Effects of Cyberbullying**



The current findings reveal that the most common effect of cyberbullying on Malaysian youths is the development of over sensitive behavior towards their surroundings. This means that the cyber victims tends to be paranoid in some aspects of their life. For instance, a cyber victim might presume a postman is trying to do something bad to him/her if he/she sees the postman standing right in front of his/her house. This paranoid effect might be progressing to a more critical level if treatment is not given to the victim.

Another common effect of cyberbullying is the development of emotional changes. Emotional changes includes difficult in controlling emotion and easily get angry over little things. The changes of emotion in the victims will bring about very damaging impact to their working and personal life. For example, the relationship with colleagues and family members might be affected due to unstable emotions experienced by the victims. Within work place context, emotion has an partial impact on the productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of an organisation (Karimi et al., 2015).

In addition to the over sensitive behavior and emotional changes, cyber victim also tends to develop insecure feelings when surfing on internet. Such insecure feeling might hinder the cyber victims to use internet for work or studies, and thereby the work performance or academic performance will be negatively affected.

Although the development of suicidal ideation among cyber victims is relatively less common within Malaysia context, this problem should not be taken for granted because it might cause long lasting and detrimental impact on personal, profesional, and team functioning (Linke et al., 2002). The effects on personal life might be poor concentration at work, and self-doubt. Whereas, anxiety of work and irritable with organisation are among the effects that can affect one's professional life.

## CONCLUSION

The present research findings have discovered several important points about the current scenario of cyberbullying among youth in Malaysia. The findings reveal that majority of youths have experienced cyberbullying in which females are the major victims of cyberbullying. The frequency of cyberbullying experience differs among ethnic group. The Malays community recorded the highest rate of cyberbullying

as compared to other ethnic groups.

The research results also show that cyberbullying most often takes place on Facebook and mobile phone apps. Other platforms, such as Twitter, email, Youtube, and so forth, are less common as compared to Facebook. Previous research have evidenced that various techniques have been used by cyberbullies to attack other cyber users. In Malaysian context, the most common cyberbullying tactics used by cyberbullies are: sending pornographic materials; giving hurtful nicknames to others; and ignore or boycott victim on chat group.

There several reasons to explain why an individual engages in cyberbullying. Some of them do that simply for entertainment purposes. Others do that due to differences of opinion on the topic of discussion. Cyberbullying will result in negative effects to the cyber victim. One of the most common effects is the development of over sensitive behaviour to towards their surroundings. Besides, emotional changes is also reported as one of the common impacts of cyberbullying among Malaysian youths. Although it is less common, the outcomes show cyberbullying also brings about behavioural changes, sleeping disorder, change of appetite, and so on. In extreme case, cyberbullying can develop suicidal ideation among cyber victims.

Pragmatic and effective actions are required in order to mitigate the problems of cyberbullying. Several suggestions have been proposed as follows:

- (i) Education of cyberbullying should be embedded in school curriculum or integrated to short courses.
- (ii) Information related to cyberbullying must be disseminated effectively to the youths.
- (iii) Proper channels are prepared to assist the victims of cyberbully.
- (iv) Laws must be reviewed and its enforcement must be strengthened.
- (v) Policies and guidelines for using social media should be produced.
- (vi) Support from family members and friends should be given to the victims.
- (vii) Proactive role should be played by governmental and non-governmental organisations especially in promoting their services to cyber victims.
- (viii) Cyberbullying prevention seminar and workshops can be organized for the community.
- (ix) Support groups and experience sharing sessions are held to promote self-esteem.
- (x) More research related to cyberbullying can be carried out to uncover richer findings.

The outputs from this research are expected to help policy makers, educational institutions, educators and parents to develop pragmatic and effective preventions, education, and interventions to prevent and address cyberbullying issues and challenges.

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