

Cyberbullying Perpetration: Children and Youth at Risk of Victimization during Covid-19 Lockdown

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Abstract: The Covid-19 is believed to have emerged in Wuhan, China, and has affected many countries across the globe. In response to this pandemic, governments in different countries have implemented social distancing measures to stop the spread of the virus. The closure of schools and switch to remote learning of universities to protect youth and children from exposure to the virus might also open opportunities for certain crimes such as cyberbullying. The study aimed at exploring the risks of victimization of children and youth through cyberbullying during the lockdown. A qualitative approach, non-participant observation was utilised. Data was collected from three social media platforms which include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram from posts since the beginning of lockdown. Keywords such as "ama2000s", "2000s" and "90s vs 2000s" were used to search for content. Facebook groups for "2000s" where most young people engage were also used. The study found that with the increase of the use of social media among children and youth during the lockdown, most have been victims of cyberbullying. In these platforms where young people engage, most posts and comments carried content which includes sexting, sexual comments on young girls' pictures, trending of videos of school children fighting, and insulting each other. A significant finding was the use of fake accounts to perpetrate cyberbullying. The study recommends that addressing cyberbullying through educating children and youth about acceptable online behaviour, signs of cyberbullying, responses to it, and cybersecurity should be prioritised.

Keywords: Children, Youth, Covid-19, Cyberbullying, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is not a new phenomenon (University of Tokyo, 2020), and the outbreak of the COVID-19 has forced many to become more dependent on the use of the internet for their daily activities. This in itself increased the potential for cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is also known as electronic bullying or online bullying is defined as bullying through email, instant messaging, in a chat room, on a website, on an online gaming site, or through digital messages or images sent to a cellular phone (Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston, 2020:1). Children living in the 21st century are exposed to various technologies including social networking sites, unlimited access to the internet and chat rooms, and a choice of mobile phone communications and this has impacted the way they communicate with each other (Badenhorst, 2011). According to South Africa's Children's Act, 38 of 2005; Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, a child is any person under the age of 18. However, the National Youth Policy defines youth as persons between the ages of 14 and 35 years (South African Regional Poverty Network, 2002). Badenhorst (2011) asserts that children and adults spend more time in a virtual world, messaging, and texting, with little to no face-to-face interactions with people. The more time spent on the internet the risk of cyberbullying may increase. On 31 December 2019, the World

Health Organization (WHO) reported a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, China (Covid-19, 2020b; WHO, 2020; Zhong *et al.*, 2020). It is stated that the virus is also known as the 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2' (SARS-CoV-2), (Sansa, 2020) was confirmed as the causative agent of what we now know as 'Coronavirus Disease 2019' (COVID-19) (South African Society of Cardiovascular Intervention, 2020). Since then, the virus has spread to more than 100 countries, including South Africa" (Covid-19, 2020b). The outbreak of the Covid-19 has affected various countries throughout the whole world and has changed how people live their lives every day. In response to this pandemic, many countries have declared restrictive measures, which include lockdown and stay-home measures (Cohut, 2020; Chinazzi *et al.*, 2020). South Africa is no exception to this pandemic. South Africa reported its first confirmed case of Covid-19 on 5 March 2020 (Mahaye, 2020) and the statistics reported to have gone higher with 572,865 cases reported on 14 August 2020, (Covid-19, 2020), thus placing the country in the top 5 countries with the most cases of covid-19 in the world (Worldometer, 2020).

The South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa announced lockdown measures with severe restrictions on travel and movement to restrict the outbreak of the virus, which include limited public gatherings, the prohibition of family visits, and other social visits (CNBC Africa, 2020; Covid-19, 2020). Covid-19 also referred to as the coronavirus has forced organisations to transition into a new way of working which is away from an office environment to work from home (Moyo,

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2020). The lockdown means that various organisations and companies would be affected including education. Several learning institutions responded by moving some of the courses to their online platforms to try and avoid the disruption of the 2020 academic calendar (Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020; Moyo, 2020). Talasila (2020) reports that over 100 countries continued to keep schools closed in July 2020 and developing the use of technology for creating remote learning opportunities. More than 1.5 billion children and young people have been affected by school closures worldwide (UNICEF, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). Many schools and institutions in South Africa were not ready for the switch to online learning thus leaving little time for them to mitigate against cyber risks (Naik, 2020). This study, therefore, aims to explore the risk of cyberbullying as the use of the internet grows during the Covid-19 lockdown.

CYBERBULLYING IN CONTEXT

Cyberbullying has become a serious challenge for many including the youth and children. Adolescents today are faced with new, unprecedented challenges and with cyber dangers that did not exist for previous generations (Newey, 2016). Govender and Skea (2015) argue that as the development of ICT continues to grow this causes a threat on the safety of young children about Information Communication Technology (ICTs). South African adolescents and youth are the first adopters of mobile technology, with 72 percent of 15 –to 24-year olds “having a cell phone” (Beger, and Sinha, 2012). As more people turn to the internet for school, work, and social use, so too do more people turn to the internet to take out their frustrations and aggression (Kowalski *et al.*, 2012:1073). According to Skiba (2014), approximately 79% of young adults aged 18–24 years have smartphones that allow them to connect to the Internet.

Newey (2016:16) refers to the youth of this century as “digital natives” and further argues that the youth has “immersed in a digital culture, which has been amplified throughout their period of child development.” Hence children and youth have taken their bullying from the real world to a cyber-world. The newest form of aggression, known as cyberbullying, has been defined as an individual or group intentionally using communication technologies as a medium to repeatedly send, upload, post, or text malicious and hurtful content to another individual or group on e-platforms (Mason, 2008). ‘Cyberbullying’ may occur through the use of tools such as mobile phones, chat

rooms, emails, instant messaging, and social networking sites by someone or a group of people to harm others (Belsey 2004; Govender and Skea, 2015). Cyberbullying appears in various forms. Kowalski *et al.* (2014) assert that cyberbullying contains four main components: intentional aggressive behaviour; repeated occurrence; perpetrator and victim power inequality; and use of technology. It includes cyberbullying, cyber dating violence, cyber harassment, online sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse of children (Peterson and Densley, 2017:194). Reports show that there are various types a person can be cyberbullied. The BullyingUK (N.d); Millar (2018) state that types of cyberbullying include:

- Harassment -whereby the bully sends offensive, rude, and insulting messages and being abusive to the victim. It also includes sending humiliating comments on posts, photos, and in chat rooms.
- Denigration –includes sending false information about another person, thus damaging their image. It also includes sharing photos of someone for the purpose to ridicule, spreading fake rumours about them. This occurs on any site online or on apps.
- Flaming- when someone is purposely using extreme and offensive language and getting into online arguments and fights with someone.
- Impersonation- includes hacking into someone’s online account such as email or any social networking account and using their online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing information or messages to or about someone. For example, cyberbullies may make -up a fake profile on any social network site, apps, and online thus making it difficult to get the owner of that account.
- Outing and Trickery- includes sharing personal information about someone or tricking them into revealing secrets and then forward it to others. They may also do this with private images and videos.
- Cyber Stalking- where the cyberbully repeatedly sends messages that include threats, harassment, intimidating messages to the victim.

Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) add that cyberbullying methods include text messages, Picture/video clips (via mobile phone Cameras); mobile

phone calls; e-mail; chat rooms; instant messages; websites and blogs; social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter); and internet gaming. Anyone who uses the internet can be a victim of cyberbullying. This study, however, focuses on youth and children who use the internet. The South African Police Services (SAPS) (N.d) reports that cyberbullying occurs when a child or teen uses the Internet, emails, text messages, instant messaging, social media websites, online forums, chat rooms, or other digital technology to harass, threaten or humiliate another child or teen. Andile Ncube, a University of Johannesburg student, mentioned that “most people find it easier to bully someone while hiding behind a screen and put someone down. People tend to be malicious because they know they can get away with it,” (Fourways Review, 2018). Cyberbullies can torment their victims 24 hours a day and can follow the victim anywhere and the humiliation can be witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people online, (SAPS, N.d).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CYBERBULLYING AND TRADITIONAL BULLYING

Researchers argue that the difference between cyberbullying and traditional is not very different; however, what makes difference is that with cyberbullying the perpetrator is usually not known to the victim and the incident might stay active longer on the internet. According to the South African College of Psychology (SACAP, 2020) the motives behind cyber and traditional bullying, have little difference in that the psychology of the bully remains much the same on internet bullying which makes the opportunity to perpetrate bullying increase and the consequences are even more devastating. Even though cyberbullying and

traditional bullying may be similar there are differences in the way in which these occur. The following are the five differences between traditional and cyberbullying (Parents Articles, Teachers Articles, Teenagers Articles, 2016):

The above table depicts the differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. The table shows that even though cyberbullying and traditional bullying may be similar cyberbullying may be extreme as the perpetrator maybe not known to the victim and unlike traditional bullying it can occur at any time as long as the victim has access to the internet or computer or mobile phone. It is argued that what makes cyberbullying more extreme for the young victims is that the perpetrator is usually not known to the victim, how the incidence occurs may have a major negative impact on the victim as the incident can stay longer on the internet. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2016) estimates that 20% of students have been bullied, with an additional 20% having experienced cyberbullying at some point during their life (Nikolaou, 2017). Furthermore, it is argued that victims of cyberbullying are usually reluctant to report to their parents as they fear that their phones and computers may be taken away from them.

Many researchers have noted that cyberbullying is rife among young people and adults; as studies show that nearly 75% of school-age children experienced this form of aggression at least once in the last year (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). According to Popovac and Fine (2016) adolescents in South Africa were more likely to have seen sexual or violent content online. The study conducted with 673 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 found that 56% of adolescents in South

Table 1: Traditional Bullying vs Cyberbullying

	Traditional	Cyberbullying
<i>Anonymity</i>	The perpetrator is known to the victim	The perpetrator is not known to the victim which places a lot of stress on the victim.
<i>Occurrence</i>	Can take place in front of a relatively small number of witnesses during that period.	Can go viral on the internet and can keep on affecting the victim for as long as it is still on the internet.
<i>Accessibility</i>	Traditional bullying usually occurs only during school hours	Cyberbullying can happen anytime anywhere if someone has access to the internet
<i>Remorse</i>	The victim may report the incident to the teachers or parents and the perpetrator may be confronted. Traditional bullies have face-to-face contact with the victims, and they might feel remorse as they see the victim.	Cyber victims usually do not report bullying as they fear that their phones or computers might be taken away from them. Cyberbullies usually do not have face-to-face contact with the victims and are therefore less likely to feel remorse for the victim. For this reason, the perpetration might continue.
<i>Evidence</i>	Although the victims are also encouraged to report bullying, keeping evidence of bullying may not be as it is with online bullying.	The evidence might be easier to save to help the victim when reporting.

Africa had been in contact with an online stranger, 40% have met with an online stranger, and 59% involved in sexting behaviour (Popovac and Fine, 2016). According to Burton and Mutongwizo (2009), 37% of 12-24-year olds in South Africa experienced cyberbullying. This shows that the more young people use the internet the higher the risks of experiencing cyberbullying. Furthermore, Serra and Venter (2011) argue that the more children use electronic interaction the risks of cyber-bullying increase including the invasion of their privacy, having access to inappropriate online content such as pornography, as well as communicating with strangers. The use of the internet continues to put children and youth at risk of cyberbullying. In a study conducted by Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni (2019) in Limpopo high school in South Africa, out of the 80 participants, 54 (68%) were victims of sexual harassment whereby the bully posted offensive sexual pictures or videos on social media, 53 (66%) experienced rumours being spread about them, 52 (65%) received aggressive text messages, 49 (61%) received harmful remarks because of their background, 48 (60%) received pictures of parts of their body, 48 (60%) were called harmful names, 47 (59%) were teased and 42 (55%) were deliberately ignored by their peers.

THE INCREASE OF THE USE OF INTERNET IN SOUTH AFRICA

One explanation for the increased cyberbullying of youth could be the increased use of social media among youth (Payi, 2018). According to the report by the Business Tech Staff Writer (2019) the use of the internet increased by 366 million globally from January 2018 to 2019; there were 4.39 billion internet users and 3.48 billion social media users in 2019. The report further states that South Africans spend the 6th longest time online, and they use the internet for an average of 8 hours and 25 minutes each day, on any device. South Africa is among the top 100 countries, ranking 76, according to Internet World Stats, the percentage of internet usage in South Africa is 55% (Bizcommunity, 2020). As of 2019, it is reported that Facebook is the leading social media platform in South Africa, with over 43.27% of the population using the site (StatCounter, 2019 in Mkhize, Gopal and Nunhall, 2020), followed by Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok (Zwane, 2020). The use of the internet comes with risks of cyberbullying, (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, and Staksrud, 2013) which include:

- Contact risks- Which includes contact with online strangers and relationship formation.
- Content risks- Being exposed to risky online content or harmful information.
- Conduct risks- Which includes sharing personal information and sexting.

This means that the victim may experience cyberbullying through having contact and forming a relationship with an online stranger, exposure to harmful content, and having their information shared and/or circulated on social media. It is reported that young people are the most active when it comes to the use of the internet.

THE IMPACT OF CYBER BULLYING ON VICTIMIZED YOUTH AND CHILDREN

Those who cyberbully may not be aware of the extent of the hurt they have caused their victims, because they do not see the emotional responses and reactions of their targets (Newey, 2016). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2010) what makes cyberbullying different from traditional bullying is that the impact of cyberbullying is worse due to the perpetrator being hidden. Also, the reach of the perpetrator combined with the humiliation of the child across a wider audience increases the negative impact; therefore, the victim's reaction can be more severe. Research suggests both public and anonymous cyberbullying incidents have more hurtful and serious psychosocial effects, in comparison to traditional bullying incidents, such as emotional stress, public humiliation, and depression (Newey, 2016). According to the SAPS (N.d) the effects can be devastating on victims of cyberbullying and can include feeling hurt, humiliated, angry, depressed, or even suicidal. Research shows that bullied teens are more likely to commit suicide. In South Africa, suicide accounts for 9.5% of unnatural teen deaths and, according to The National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, 17.6% of teens have attempted suicide and 31.5% of these attempts required medical attention. (SACAP, 2018). There is potential for these statistics to increase with the increase in cyberbullying. The risks surrounding online activity serves to highlight the need to educate children and young adults about the advantages, risks, and responsibilities of using information technology (Govender and Skea, 2015). Little is known about the prevalence of the problem or about coping strategies for cyberbully victims in South Africa (Badenhorst, 2011). Hinduja and Patchin (2008)

argue that the level of risk of children experiencing harassment through electronic media has always been neglected.

Research shows that cyberbullying can have extensive negative impacts on the victims (Farhangpour *et al.*, 2017). Gordon (2016) reports that teenage victims of cyberbullying experience anxiety, fear, depression, low self-esteem, resulting in feeling overwhelmed, vulnerable, powerless, revengeful, exposed, humiliated, isolated, and losing interest in schooling and life. The general impacts of cyberbullying on children include a poor academic performance at school, decline in quality of family relationships, low self-esteem, and depression (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010; Li, 2010). Furthermore, cyberbullying is regarded to be more serious than traditional bullying; however, Macaulay (2020) states that there is a lack of reporting of cyberbullying and it is less visible as compared to face-to-face bullying. Cilliers and Chinyamurindi (2020) argue that there is a lack of awareness on the topic of cyberbullying in South Africa, in a study conducted, 67.3% of students and teachers were not aware of specific instances of cyberbullying in the South African context. Apart from the lack of knowledge, it is also evident that children do not report cyberbullying due to the fear of consequences.

Smit (2015) argues that modern technology is growing rapidly making it hard for the methods to curb cyberbullying to keep up. Even though the South African constitution protects human rights there is no specific legislation that deals with cyberbullying. There is no prosecution in the country for cyberbullying; however, the South African constitution does have rights such as Section 10 which says "everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected, as well as the right to privacy enshrined on section 14 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Sabinet Law (2017) states that South African legislation is in the process of being amended to deal with emerging cyberspace intimidation, as evidenced in the tabling of the Cybercrimes and Cybersecurity Bill. Cyberbullying is more likely to fall under harassment or bullying (Sacco *et al.*, 2012:5), as in the case of South Africa (Mkhize *et al.*, 2020). If a cyberbullying incident is not reported to the appropriate authorities, a single post may be accessible for many years after the incident takes place, leading to long-term abuse of the victim(s) due to the permanency associated with the post (Wolak *et al.*, 2007). UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said "we call on governments and industry to join

forces to keep children and young people safe online through enhanced safety features and new tools to help parents and educators teach their children how to use the internet safely," (UNICEF, 2020). This shows that the risk of cyberbullying of young people is a threat during the Covid-19.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON CYBERBULLYING

There are different theories used to explain how people behave. For this study, the social learning theory is used to explain the behaviour of youth on cyberbullying. The focus is on the behaviour of both the victim and the perpetrator. Bandura (1971) asserts that learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1997:22). In his theory, Bandura (1971) argues that new patterns of behaviour are learnt either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of example. Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1971). The author further argues that behaviour can be learnt through direct experience or through observing others. Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences (Bandura).

The most common example of learnt behaviour is television where mostly young people may learn things from watching. However, for this study, the theory explains how behaviour is learnt on social media. Children and youth may be exposed to the internet and learn new behaviours including being perpetrators of bullying or being putting themselves at risk of being victims of cyberbullying without being aware. The more time spent on social media the high possibility of observing and learning new behaviours. For example, the youth and children may observe the kinds of posts and comments on social media and might involve themselves without being aware that they are exposing themselves to cyberbullying. The children and youth may not be aware of what is wrong or right on social media and expose themselves to different kinds of behaviours on the internet or social media.

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses specifically on exploring the risk of cyberbullying perpetration among children and youth during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. Considering lockdown rules to be followed and considering the ethical issues the study considered that there might be challenges to obtain participants and therefore the study used qualitative secondary data as a data source. Secondary data was useful for this study owing to its easy access and for ethical purposes. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were used as they represent three of the most preferred social media platforms in South Africa (StatCounter, 2019; Lama, 2020). The posts and comments used from these social media platforms were taken from when the lockdown in South Africa began; that is 27 March 2020 till September 2020. On Facebook, six groups were examined based on their popularity and the fact that they are made specifically for young people. Table 1 above presents the description of the types of groups used that participate in these online interactions since lockdown began on 27 March 2020. Table 2 presents

the type of tweets shared on Twitter. Table 3 presents the description of accounts that are used by youth in South Africa. The data was collected from these social media posts and comments from the 27th of March 2020 when the lockdown began in South Africa.

The above table presents the description of Facebook groups that were used in this study as data. These groups are created on Facebook specifically for young people. Any person can join the group, but they are created mostly for people born in the 2000s and 90s. The researcher selected memes, pictures, written posts, and comments that were observed to be about cyberbullying. From these groups, a total number of 27 memes were used to make fun of others in the groups, 49 were pictures that contained sexual content such as nudity and pictures of people who posted but received insulting comments. 68 written posts were written to insult, make fun of others, and mostly sexting. Also, a total number of 86 comments from memes, pictures, and written posts were observed to contain sexual harassment, insults, and sexting. The study found that the creation of new groups by the end of 2019 and

Table 2: Facebook Data

Group Name	Description and number of members	Memes	Pictures	Written posts	Comments on a post
Ngwana Ref	A group with 95 thousand members of all ages including young people across the country. Created in February 2020. Members of this group can share anything including pictures or memes. The group gets 100+ posts per day	4	8	11	15
Ama 2000	Created in August 2019 and still active. It is a South African group made for people born in the 2000s. The group has 100+ posts per day and has a total number of 9.6 thousand members .	3	8	15	16
Ama 2000 only sorry ama 90s	A group was created for only the 2000s and excludes the 90s. It was created in October 2019 and has 1.2 thousand members with 5+ posts per day.	2	4	5	5
Black Facebook	Created April 2020. Has a total number of 607 thousand members with 9.1 thousand posts a day. Members of this group include all ages. The group allows people to share anything including memes, pictures, or written posts.	14	17	24	20
UniZulu, UKZN, UNISA, DUT, MUT, UCT Meet and Socialize	The group was created in November 2015 and is still active. It is for students from different universities to meet and socialise as well as share knowledge. The group gets 20+ posts a day and has a total number of 8.8 thousand members .	4	5	7	8
Umdavazowama 2k nama 90z	A group of people born in the 90s and 2000s. The group is used to share posts that contain sexual content. This includes videos, pictures, and written posts. The group was created in February 2020 and has 4.8 thousand members with 25+ posts per day.	0	7	6	22
TOTAL		27	49	68	86

beginning of 2020 increased the usage of social media among young people. The posts that indicated cyberbullying increased during the lockdown period. There is no concrete evidence that shows whether cyberbullying has increased from these groups during lockdown; however, the study found that some of these groups were created in the year 2020 and became more active on the period of May and September 2020 with some groups having more than 20 posts of which many of them indicate cyberbullying. The study included only the posts from the beginning of lockdown.

Table 3: Twitter Data

Data Location	Number
Video	4
Memes	7
Tweets	8
Comments	6
TOTAL	25

The above table includes the number of videos, memes, written tweets, and comments observed from twitter to contain any form of cyberbullying directed to young people. In finding data the researcher observed the Twitter trends from the beginning of lockdown. The researcher also used the keywords such as ama 2000s, cyberbullying, bullies to gather more data. Four videos of young children being humiliated were found. Seven memes used to make fun of others, eight written tweets, and six comments that contained violence and insults were observed. The findings show that the usage of Twitter increased during the lockdown period. Lama (2020) mentions that the hashtags used on Twitter in 2020 alone are over 1.3 million with the population of active users aged 13 years and older.

Table 4: Instagram Data

Data Location	Number
Pictures	25
Videos	8
Comments	10
TOTAL	53

The above table presents Instagram data which includes pictures, videos, and comments. The data was collected using the hashtag ama2000. Under that

hashtag, 25 pictures were found to contain sexual content such as nudity. Eight videos contained sexual content such as naked girls. Under those pictures and videos, 10 comments were found to be sexually harassing individuals, especially young women.

The data was collected from social media posts from the year 2020 To find the data the researcher searched for the most active groups on Facebook. The most active groups on Facebook included groups such as Ama 2000s which are the groups for young people. On Twitter, the researcher randomly searched for posts under the hashtags used on Twitter during the lockdown. The researcher also used the words such as "cyberbullying", "bullied", and "cyberbullied" to search for the topics on Twitter that touch on the issue of cyberbullying in South Africa. In the search for data on Instagram, the researcher searched for words such as ama the 2000s, funny memes, Mzansi jokes. The results depicted that the use of the internet in South Africa is still high and has gone higher during the Covid-19 pandemic. This, therefore, placed the question on the risk of the youth and children being victimized through cyberbullying as they use the internet. The findings show that cyberbullying increased on Instagram during the lockdown period. Under the hashtag 'ama2000' there were more post which included sexual content and insulting comments. The hashtag has 1000+ posts; however, more of these posts were during the lockdown period.

The study was informed by three main questions:

- How have the youth and children been using social media during the Covid-19 lockdown?
- What are the cyberbullying experiences of youth and children in South Africa during the Covid-19 lockdown?
- What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?

The next session discusses the findings of the study. The study used content analysis and six themes were developed. The themes are discussed below.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In an attempt to explore the risks of victimisation of children and youth through cyberbullying during Covid-19 lockdown the study used thematic analysis and six themes were identified. The themes include increased cyberbullying during Covid-19 lockdown, humiliation,

online violence, post sharing sexual content, harassment, reaction to cyberbullying. The themes were developed based on the research questions and they are discussed below.

The following theme presents the question - How have the youth and children been using social media during Covid-19 lockdown?

Increased use of Internet and Cyberbullying during Covid-19 Lockdown

Fourie (2020) reports that the use of the internet including social media has increased during lockdown with 69 percent of youth between 16 and 24 years old using the internet. According to Savides (2020), the deputy social development minister Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu said Covid-19 and the lockdown "brought several challenges for children" as they have been spending more time online, which posed its challenges. She further mentioned that:

"We experienced an increase in cyberbullying. It also said to us that there is a lot of policy and there's a lot of education that needs to happen, in terms of parents understanding what kind of content their children are exposed to from the phones we buy them and the time that they spend [on devices]." (Savides, 2020)

Children and youth face high risks from online predators as they spend more time on the internet during the Covid-19 lockdown (Dippenaar, 2020). "In South Africa, the current lockdown may put children's privacy in danger as they spend more time online. They may be more likely to encounter online risks, including being exposed to child sexual abuse material, or child sexual abuse and exploitation. And while sharing images and stories of lockdown and its challenges through social media is a way to stay connected, children's rights to privacy and protection should not be compromised," (UNICEF, 2020). Some of the tweets

shared also expressed concerns about the increase in cyberbullying.

Reports show that there may be a risk for the increase of cyberbullying in children and young adults (Staff Writer, 2020). The Global Partnership to End Violence Executive Director Dr. Howard Taylor said that "school closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world, but not all children have the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to keep themselves safe online," (UNICEF, 2020). It is further argued that the increase in online usage since the Covid-19 pandemic hit has resulted in a major spike in cybercrimes such as cyberbullying, phishing, and hacking (Naik, 2020). The prevalence of cyberbullying behaviours is increasing dramatically as a consequence of the growing accessibility and utilization of electronic and mobile devices among school-aged children (Olweus, 2013).

In using the hashtag cyberbullying on Twitter, the tweets mentioned that there has been an increase in cyberbullying during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. Kahla (2020) concurs by stating that due to the lockdown there has been a spike in the use of the internet as workers have begun working remotely from home and students also have to continue with their studies virtually from home. This increase in the use of the internet among youth and children places has placed them at a high risk of cyberbullying. The study found that there were groups created on social media specifically for young people where they share posts and comments and it was also observed that cyberbullying occurs largely in these groups.

On the question- what are the cyberbullying experiences of youth and children in South Africa during Covid-19 lockdown? – five themes were developed and are discussed below.



Figure 1: Tweets on the increase of cyberbullying during lockdown (Tweeted on 13 August 2020; 07 August 2020).

Humiliation

The study found that there were various videos of young teenagers being involved in fights. The videos show teenagers including school learners with school uniforms fighting. These videos had been shared on different social media platforms which include Facebook Groups and Twitter with more than 2000 views, comments, and shares. Some of these videos were turned into memes to make fun of the teenagers involved in the fights on the video. The pictures shared in these groups are shared in this article; however, the faces of learners are censored for ethical purposes.



Figure 2: Videos shared on Twitter of young girls fighting (posted on 14 September).

The above videos were shared and Twitter. One video had 27.5 thousand views on Twitter and another had 221 views. More videos were shared on platforms such as Facebook groups including a video of two schoolgirls fighting while one person recorded the fight and it was shared on various platforms. The sharing of these videos may humiliate one of both people involved in the fight as it may be not recorded based on their consent and this could have a devastating effect on the victims. The videos are sometimes turned into memes to make fun of the people in the video.



Figure 3: Picture from a video that trended on Facebook groups used as a meme (Posted on 14 September 2020).

This picture was used on one of the Facebook groups to make fun of the girls that were fighting and the meme was shared on different groups with 100+ shares on each group and 800+ comments and 500+ reactions. The comments included people sharing their WhatsApp numbers to have the video shared with them. This finding is similar to the definition of outing and trickery by Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) whereby someone shares personal information about someone which includes private images and videos. In this case, the videos and pictures circulated on social media were of young girls who were video recorded fighting.

Online Violence

Online violence was observed to be one of the most common experiences that occur on social media. This involved the use of vulgar language as well as threats.



Figure 4: Tweets of arguments from Twitter (Tweeted on 09 September 2020 and 19 August 2020).

Online violence is another form of cyberbullying that occurs mostly on social media and the internet at large. Based on the findings, online violence included racism, condoning violence as well as gender-based violence. The findings are similar to the explanation of flaming by Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) who explain that it is when someone is purposely using extreme and offensive language and getting into online arguments and fights with someone.

Posts Sharing Sexual Content

Sexting was the major finding of this study. Popovac and Fine(2016) assert that adolescents in South Africa were more likely to have seen sexual or violent content online. On Facebook groups and Instagram posts of half-naked girls were shared. On those posts, comments were responding using sexual messages. Some of these posts included the following:

"Let's share girls [emojis] via inbox is horny as fuck"- Ama 2000.

"Hi, guys I'm new in this group, any sex abusers ladies? [emoticons] buwalenna pls [emoticons]" Ama 2000

"[Emoticon] I suck pussy and live it there [emoticon]" Ama 2000

"Inbox for nudes" Black Facebook

"Let's exchange nudes" Black Facebook

These posts had many reactions and comments which included young people engaging in sexual conversations and making jokes. The responses include "inbox me your nudes", "share with me" and "I can fuck you now." The findings show that most young people are exposed to sexual content and pornography.



Figure 5: Posts sharing sexual (Posted on 11 September 2020).

The findings concur with Serra and Venter's (2011) argument that as children use electronic interaction more the risks of cyber-bullying increase which includes having access to inappropriate online content such as pornography, as well as communicating with strangers. The finds show that more groups such as ama 2000s on Facebook and Instagram accounts contain more sexual content and pornography. This, therefore, expose young people to this risk of cyberbullying.

Harassment

About the above finding (sexting), it was also observed that while there were pictures of half-naked girls were used to harass women by how they look. It was found that some of the pictures of half-naked girls that were used on social media were not posted by the owner of the picture and some were used to make fun of them. Furthermore, the comments included men and boys using comments such as "I want to see what's under that skirt?" It was found that the victims of sexual harassment are mostly young women whereas the

perpetrators are both young and older men.

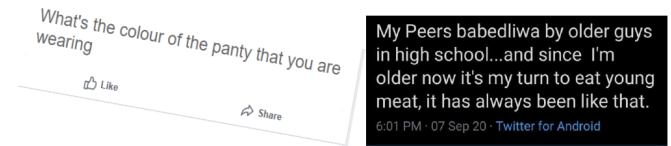


Figure 6: Posts by men used to harass women (Posted on 11 September 2020; tweeted 07 September 2020).

The findings of this study concur with the explanation of harassment by BullyingUK (N.d); Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) that includes sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages and being abusive to the victim. The findings show the disrespect towards the woman and could therefore make women feel uncomfortable on social media.

The use of Fake Accounts

It was found that on all three social media platforms, that is, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram there were individuals who used fake accounts to pretend to be someone else. This includes using the names and pictures of someone else. Some people use fake accounts to post or comment on other people's posts using insults or harassing others. Some of these Fake accounts were recognised to be fake accounts, see Figure 8.



Figure 7: People identifying and mentioning fake accounts (Posted on 24 July and 22 August 2020; tweeted 23 May 2020).

Eleven accounts were observed to be fake accounts by other social media users. These accounts were used reportedly using the fake identity of someone to ask for help from other people with the purpose to deceive them, insulting others, and to post sexual content and insult others. These fake accounts were active on the groups for young people on Facebook and some fake accounts were observed from Twitter. The findings of this study are similar to the assertion that the perpetrators of cyberbullying may impersonate others in many ways with include hacking into someone's online account such as email or any social

networking account and using their online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing information or messages to or about someone. For example, cyberbullies may make up a fake profile on any social network site, apps, and online thus making it difficult to get the owner of that account. Therefore, using fake accounts is still another form of cyberbullying that continues to occur and victimise the youth in South Africa and may have a major impact on the victim.

The following theme was developed based on the research question- What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?

Reaction to Cyberbullying

It was further noted that the issue of cyberbullying has a devastating effect on victims. The victims may experience anxiety after seeing an embarrassing video or post about themselves circulating.

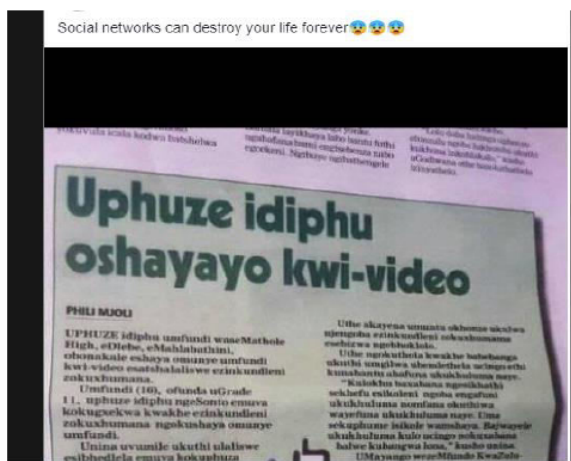


Figure 8: A post of a newspaper article about a girl who attempted suicide after her video trended. (Posted on 10 September 2020).

The above image shows a newspaper article shared on social media, also circulating, about one of the girls who were fighting on the video that she had attempted suicide after her video had circulated all over social media. This shows that the impact of cyberbullying may be extreme to the point that the victim may take their life. The findings from the National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, also show that 17.6% of teens who had experienced cyberbullying have attempted suicide (SACAP, 2018). Gordon (2016) reports that teenage victims of cyberbullying experience anxiety, fear, depression, low self-esteem, resulting in feeling overwhelmed, vulnerable, powerless, revengeful, exposed, humiliated, isolated, and losing interest in schooling and life.

CONCLUSION

Currently, there is no concrete evidence that shows an increase from before Covid-19. However, the findings of this study show that children and youth in South Africa have been engaging in more on social media since the lockdown period. Based on this research it is clear that the engagement of young people on Twitter trends, Instagram, and Facebook groups puts them at a higher risk of cyberbullying which includes circulating violent videos, posting sexual content, and insulting others under fake accounts. The findings further show that cyberbullying hurts victims including depression which could lead to suicide. However, victims of cyberbullying may not report this kind of victimisation due to the lack of knowledge and not knowing where to report to. Cyberbullying needs to be addressed for young people to be aware of the appropriate online behaviour and be aware of the possible risks of becoming a victim of cyberbullying. There should be more security when it comes to the use of the internet. Awareness programmes should also be available online where the youth and children are mostly active including encouraging young people to speak about cyberbullying as the findings suggest that there are negative impacts on victims of cyberbullying which include low self-esteem, depression and even suicide. Future research on cyberbullying will also focus more on cybersecurity. Future research should also focus on perpetrators of cyberbullying.

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Received on 01-01-2021

Accepted on 25-01-2021

Published on 22-02-2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2021.10.61>

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