

# Cyberbullying in KSA in the Era of Covid-19

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**Abstract**— The Internet has become one of the most critical technologies that enable people around the world to communicate with one other at speed, which did not occur in the past. Despite this great positivity of the Internet and social media programs that changed the world's perspective on communication, it created many problems, the most important of which is the problem of electronic bullying. In this paper, the aim is to discuss the phenomena of cyberbullying and the most important reasons for its occurrence. This was achieved by reviewing existing research about cyberbullying in general with the focus on the impact on children and young people. Moreover, the paper will examine the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the level of cyberbullying in Saudi Arabia using primary data collected via an online survey with 205 responses.

**Keywords**— Cyberbullying, COVID-19, Saudi Arabia, Social media.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The increase in Internet use has led to the rise of social media applications. Social media plays an essential role in our life. People now include social media in their daily routine. Social media have changed ways of communication and the relationship between people. The positive impact of using it is the ease of making new friends globally, connecting to large groups of people, and discovering new hobbies and interests. However, sometimes social media and misuse of it could lead to a problem called cyberbullying [1].

## II. CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying, according to Hardcastle, "is a form of harassment that occurs via the Internet that may include vicious forum posts, name-calling in chat rooms, posting fake profiles on websites, and mean or cruel email messages "[1]

Cyberbullying has become widespread recently; it allows the perpetrator to post things online in front of his peers to insult others and make them a laughingstock. This type of bullying occurs using social media programs and is carried out by an individual or group to target a party, often repeatedly and aggressively. Cyberbullies also have the ability to hide their identity by stealing the identity of another person or creating false identities to terrorize their victims. Being a frequent target of cyberbullying may result in the victim committing suicide, causing self-harm, or developing emotional scars [2]. There are many reasons for cyberbullying. For example, some cyberbullying can stem from the desire to control others, jealousy of the successes of others, the desire to increase their status, and attract attention. In addition, sometimes it stems from the nature of the adolescent, who tends to love the excitement and pushing their limits since cyberbullying gives

an accessible and broad space for that. Charles et al. (2013, p.3) list the reasons for cyberbullying as follows [3]:

1. "Anonymity Approval"
2. "Boredom Feel Better"
3. "Instigate Jealousy"
4. "No perceived consequences Projection of feelings"
5. "Protection Reinvention of self"
6. "Revenge".

A number of research papers about cyberbullying will be presented in the following section.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research includes that cyberbullying growth is giving a cause of concern. Cyberbullies, unlike physical bullies, do not need to be strong. They only need a computer or a cell phone. Gonzales (2014) conducted a study that gathered opinions from eight experts answering the following specific questions:

1. What is social media's role in cyberbullying?
2. What standards are being violated when somebody uses social media to cause harm to others?
3. What measures should be implemented to prevent or control cyberbullying?

In his study, experts agreed that cyberbullying would not happen without social media. In answering the other questions, they agreed that there are no specific standards for using social media, and the users should take full responsibility for preventing cyberbullying [1].

In addition, another study [4] highlighted the rate of cyberbullying in South Korea in the COVID-19 period by comparing the rate of cyberbullying during COVID to rate the of cyberbullying pre-COVID, which is portrayed in Table 1. After comparing the rates of cyberbullying between 2019 and 2020, the study found that in 2019, the rate was 26.9%, whereas, in 2020, the rate (culprit or casualty) was 22.8%, showing a 4.1% drop from the previous year. The Perpetration rate of cyberbullying in 2020 was 9.5%, which is a sharp decay of 8.5% compared to the previous year, as shown in Table 1 [4].

TABLE 1. Rate of cyberbullying [4]

Year	2019	2020
n	4779	4958
Perpetration or victimization	26.9%	22.8%
Perpetration	18.0%	9.5%
Victimization	19.0%	19.7%
Both Perpetration and victimization	10.1%	6.4%

Moreover, a report entitled "Young Online Türkiye" was published on November 3, 2011, and it showed that

cyberbullying had become an increasing problem as a result of the increased accessibility to the Internet and other technological devices. It has been stated that 56% out of 1470 people in Turkey with an average age of 23 reported having been victims of cyberbullying at least once. In addition, this study has shown the female participants had a significantly higher level of social anxiety and avoidance than male participants. Differences between the gender and social factors can both be illustrated in Table 2 [5].

TABLE 2: Males and Females Numbers

Induces	Males (n=53)		females(n=83)		L	df
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Cyber Bullying</b>	22.45	11.47	19.51	1.62	1.86	53
<b>CB1</b>	8.32	5.40	7.18	0.63	1.53	53
<b>CB2</b>	9.23	1.82	8.21	0.84	1.92	55
<b>CB3*</b>	4.91	2.64	4.12	0.53	2.14	55
<b>Cyber Vietnamization</b>	24.13	9.78	22.37	4.95	1.39	134
<b>CV1</b>	9.08	4.04	8.37	2.02	1.34	134
<b>CV2</b>	10.08	4.04	9.64	2.52	0.78	134
<b>CV3</b>	4.98	2.27	4.36	1.17	1.83	70
<b>Social anxiety*</b>	46.3	11.54	52.01	11.14	-2.8	127
<b>Social Avoidance</b>	45.46	10.12	49.29	10.66	-2.03	127

Additionally, a study [6] done in 2019 about the relationship between the use of social media and cyberbullying using a cross-national analysis of young people in 42 countries found that students from 11-15 years old are facing the issue of cyberbullying and females more than males as detailed in Table 3. The study focused on three properties which are: intense, problematic, and talking with strangers online.

TABLE 3: Description of international study sample [6]

Description of the international study sample. HBSC study 2018	
Descriptor	Number
<b>Number of countries reporting. n</b>	42
<b>Total participants. n</b>	180.919
<b>By country. n</b>	
<b>Median</b>	3,715
<b>Minimum</b>	1,446 (Albania)
<b>Maximum</b>	11,155 (wales)
<b>By gender. n (%)</b>	
<b>Boys</b>	86,981 (48.1)
<b>Girls</b>	93,938 (51.9)
<b>By age group. n (%)</b>	
<b>11 years</b>	56,219 (31.1)
<b>13 years</b>	62,661 (34.6)
<b>15 years</b>	62,039 (34.3)

On the other hand, a study done in 2014 discussed cyberbullying from the perspective of choice theory [7]. This study proposed an explanation for the problem of cyberbullying within the framework of the theory of choice developed by William Glasser and its effects on the victims. It showed that there is a negative relationship between cyberbullying and internal values. In fact, the choice theory focuses on the concept of successful and unsuccessful identity. It was found that cyberbullying behaviors aim to satisfy the feelings of entertainment and power. Furthermore, it revealed that cyberbullies have unsuccessful identity characteristics such as feelings of mistrust and worthlessness [7]. Regarding definitions, research done in 2014 included a clear and specific definition of bullying, particularly with children. Bullying has been described as "a dynamic concept in practice and not as static as the tenacious conventional definition suggests" [8].

Moreover, in 2015, a study has defined cyberbullying as "deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all young people and is a peer-to-peer risk" [9].

In the following section, the methodology, results, analysis, and discussion of this study on cyberbullying in Saudi Arabia will be presented and followed by the conclusion.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The primary data have been collected using Google Forms. The sample was random to reach as many participants as possible in Saudi Arabia and avoid accusing anyone of being a cyberbully. Random sampling allowed participants to feel free, to be honest about cyberbullying with maintaining full privacy. The online survey was sent through WhatsApp on 22 OCT 2021. The participants numbered 205 from both genders, and the age ranged from 18 to 54. The questionnaire has been designed to include closed questions to facilitate the analysis. The questionnaire aims at investigating the level of cyberbullying in Saudi Arabia, especially on social media apps, to determine which app has the highest level of bullying and study the reasons for cyberbullying besides the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the study will explore the feasibility of preventing the phenomenon of Cyberbullying.

V. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire participants were 205 from both genders; surprisingly 191 were females, which is 93.2% percent, and were 14 males, which is 6.8% percent. The ages ranged from 18 to 54; the percentage of people whose ages were from 18 - 24 was 49.8% (102 people), from 25 - 34 was 9.8% (20 people), from 35 - 44 was 22.4% (46 people), and from 45 - 55 was 18% (37 people).

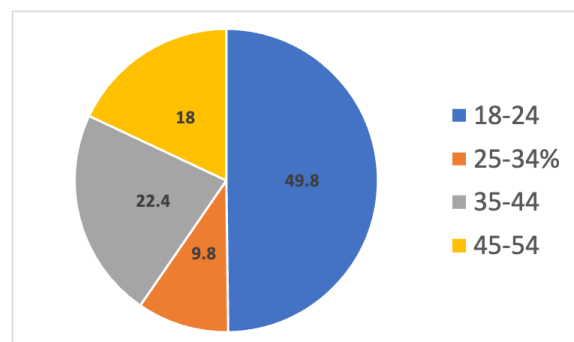


Figure 1. The age range of the participants

Figure 1 showed that most of the sample was in the age range of 18-24, which is considered as young adults.

158 out of 205 people answered "no" to the question "Have you ever been cyberbullied?" representing 77.1%, and 47 people answered "yes" to the question, which represented 22.9%.

Figure 2 showed that most of the sample had not been cyberbullied.

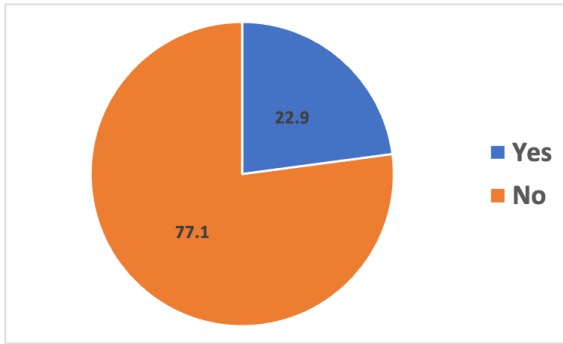


Figure 2. The answer to the question of "Have you ever been cyberbullied?".

The number of the people who answered yes to being cyberbullied is 32 out of 47, which is 68.1% answered "no" to the question "If you have been cyberbullied, did you report it to anyone?", and 15 people, which is 31.9% answered "yes," see Figure 3.

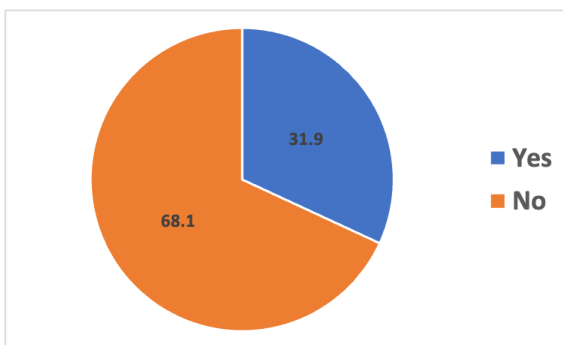


Figure 3. The answer to the question of "If you have been cyberbullied, did you report it to anyone?".

Most of the sample did not report the incident of cyberbullying, which raises the question of why they did not. However, among the people who answered yes to the question "If you have been cyberbullied, did you report it to anyone?", they were asked the question "Who have you told about being cyberbullied?" and 7 out of 15, which is 46.7% answered with the "friends" option, three people representing 20% answered with the "teacher" option. Also, three people, representing 20%, answered with the "family" option, and two people, representing 13.3%, chose the "competent authorities" option, see Figure 4.

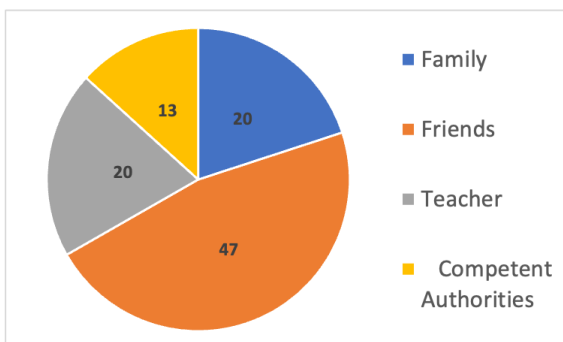


Figure 4. The answer to the question of "Who have you told about being cyberbullied?".

Surprisingly Figure 4 shows that informing teachers and family about the case of cyberbullying are equal while informing friends is the most frequently occurring.

66 people (32.2%) answered the question "How often do you think cyberbullying happens?" on the linear scale as 5, which means it happens all the time, 34 people (21%) answered on the linear scale as 4, 54 people (26.3%) answered on the linear scale as 3, 21 people (10.2%) answered on a linear scale as 2, and 21 people (10.2%) answered on the linear scale as 1 which means it never happens (see Figure 5).

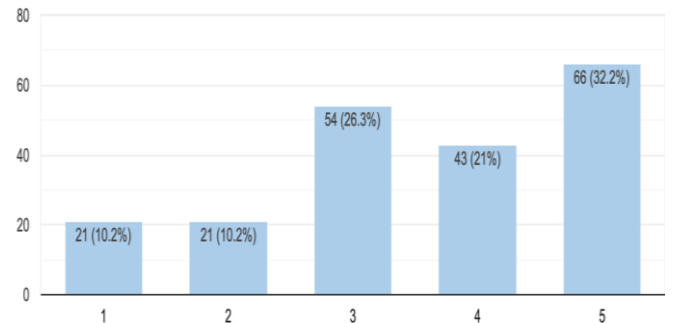


Figure 5. The answer to the question of How often do you think cyberbullying happens?

The question about "On which of the social media apps has the cyberbullying occurred the most?" has been answered by 117 people with the Twitter option, which is 57.1%, 114 people answered with the TikTok option, which is 55.6%, 97 people answered with the Instagram option which is 47.3%, 86 people answered with the Snapchat option which is 42%, 22 people answered with the Facebook option which is 10.7%, and 22 people answered with the YouTube option which is 10.7% (see Figure 6).

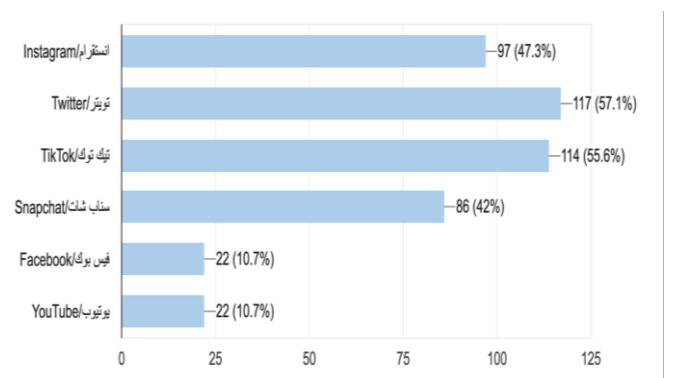


Figure 6. The answer to the question of "Which one of the social media apps has the cyberbullying occurred the most?"

The question about "Do you agree that cyberbullying increased during the COVID-19 pandemic?" has been answered by 78 people; 38.2% answered with "agree," 64 people, which is 31.4% answered with "neutral." Forty-five people, which is 22.1% percent, answered with "strongly agree", 14 people, which is 6.9% answered "disagree", three people, which is 1.5% answered, "strongly disagree". In this research, it was assumed that during COVID-19 quarantine, people have been facing extensive use of the Internet and consequently, more

cyberbullying will have occurred, and this has been proven based on the results as shown in Figure 7.

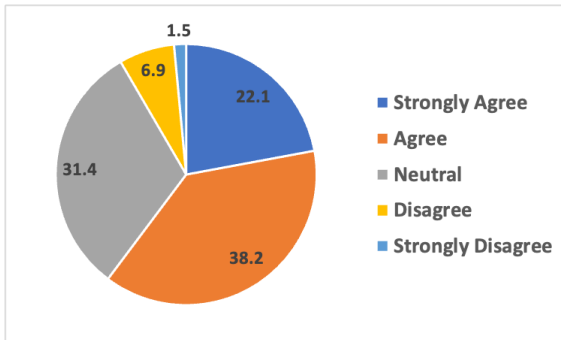


Figure 7. The answer to the question of "Do you agree that cyberbullying increased during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

The question about "Do you think cyberbullying is worse than or not as bad as physical bullying?" has been answered by 99 people, which is 48.3% as "maybe", 59 people, which is 28.8% as "yes", and 47 people, which is 22.9% as "no", see Figure 8.

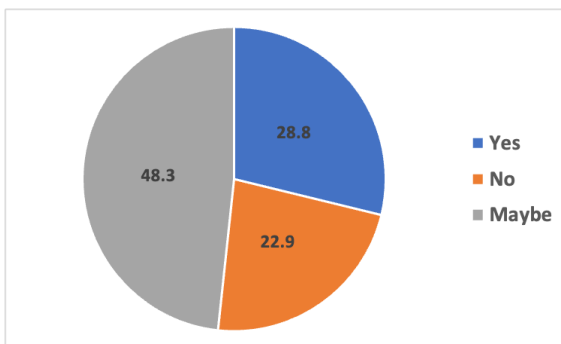


Figure 8. The answer to the question of "Do you think cyberbullying is worse than or not as bad as physical bullying?"

Figure 8 reflects that people are not sure about the level of harm of being bullied, either online or physical.

The question "If you see a person on social media who differs from you in views, style, and appearance, do you find in yourself wanting to bully them?" has been answered by 171 people, which is 83.4%, with "no", 29 people, which is 14.1%, as "maybe", and five people, which is 2.4% as "yes", see Figure 9.

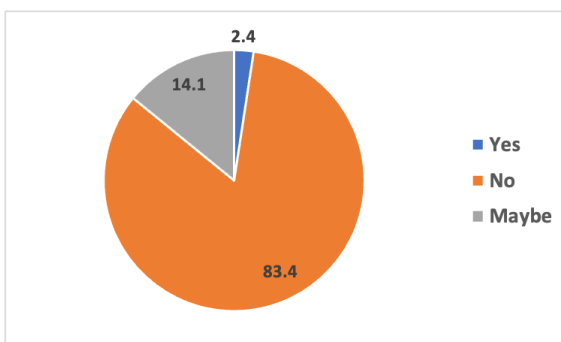


Figure 9. The answer to the question of "If you see a person on social media who differs from you in views, style, and appearance, do you find in yourself wanting to bully them?"

Figure 9 shows that the majority of the respondents reported that they would not bully others based on differences between them.

The question "Do you agree cyberbullying can be prevented?" has been answered by 85 people, which is 41.5%, with "agree", 76 people, which is 37.1% answered "strongly agree", 27 people, which is 13.2% answered "neutral", 13 people, which is 6.3% answered "disagree", and four people, which is 2% percent answered, "strongly disagree".

Lastly, regarding the question "Choose the reason in your opinion to increase the number of cyberbullying?" has been answered by 115 people, which is 56.1%, as "there is no punishment for a bully", 49 people, which is 23.9% answered "showing your personal life on social media", 28 people, which is 13.7% answered "anyone can bully an unknown person", seven people, which is 3.4% answered "impact of COVID-19 pandemic". For the personal opinion option, six people, which is 0.5% have answered based on their opinion about the reasons for cyberbullying as follows:

- 1- "They are raised in a toxic environment."
- 2- "Because of the ease of communicating opinion through social media, and also because of the poor upbringing of children, a bully and indifferent generation will arise."
- 3- "Lack of parental supervision, as well as lack of awareness of the impact of bullying on a person."
- 4- "Because of the lack of good upbringing."
- 5- "Because of weak personality and neglect of parents."
- 6- "Due to the quarantine during the Corona crisis, there was nothing to do, so cyberbullying increased".

## VI. DISCUSSION

The questionnaire's results revealed that the Twitter app had been most used for Cyberbullying, followed by TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and surprisingly the least used are YouTube and Facebook equally. The most frequently given reason for cyberbullying was unawareness or absence of punishment. Results showed that victims of cyberbullying preferred to tell a friend about it rather than family, a teacher, or assigned authorities. Many participants hope to prevent cyberbullying. Also, most of them said that they would not engage in bullying others who differ in views, lifestyle, and appearance, which is positive.

Through reviewing previous research and comparing it with our study, it has been found that cyberbullying is a problem, especially among females and that it has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the more frequent use of social media in the lockdown and work/study from the home period.

## VII. CONCLUSION

From the research, we found that most of the participants desire to prevent cyberbullying and that the most frequently used app for bullying is Twitter. Also, most participants agreed that the reason for cyberbullying is that there is the weak awareness about the punishment for cyberbullying.

Respondents perceived reasons for cyberbullying were included:

- Raising/upbringing issues
- Lack of parental supervision.

- Lack of punishment awareness.
- Insecure personality.
- Free time (quarantine during the Corona crisis).

Finally, we invite researchers to continue researching this issue, especially with the spread of social networking applications on a large scale, in order to find way to mitigate the effects of cyberbullying on the coming generations, and to help create healthy environment which is free of emotional scaring.

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