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Cybercitizen's Experience on Cyber Attacks and Threats from Online Platforms Amidst Pandemic and Community Lockdown

Earl Jones G. Muico[1*], Marjo Neil R. Villasin[2], Kate Casia[3], Kimberly B. Macunlay[4]

[1]Department of Arts and Sciences Education, University of Mindanao-Tagum College, Philippines*
[2,3,4]Department of Criminal Justice Education, University of Mindanao-Tagum College, Philippines

Email: [2]neilvillasin15@gmail.com, [3]k.casia.136603.tc@umindanao.edu.ph, [4]k.macunlay.120281.tc@umindanao.edu.ph
Corresponding Email: [1]ejm_131@yahoo.com*

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Abstract: ***This study sought to uncover the experience cybercitizen's who experienced cyber-attacks amidst pandemic and community lockdown. More specifically, it focused on the experience of the youth, coping strategies, and insights on cyberbullying. The study is qualitative by nature with 7 identified participants. The results show various means of cyber-bullying experienced by the participants. Moreover, the participants also shared different coping strategies to deal with their experience. Furthermore, participants shared insights on their experiences.***

Keywords: Cyber-Attack, Cyberbullying, Social Media, Mental Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the earlier phases of the pandemic, people were forced to be confined in their households. This was a necessary measure to protect citizens from the threat of covid [1]. People now had more time to do other things because they stayed at home. Consequently, this led to spending increased usage of internet-based platforms [2]. Such changes also opened the potential to the dangers of the internet. One of which is cybercrime.

Cybercrime has existed for several years, however the sudden increase in the percentage of the population using the internet have resulted to more opportunities for cybercrimes to occur [3]. One of the recently recognized form of cybercrime is cyberbullying. It is a common type of cyber crime that affects mental health [4-5]. In fact, the extended time on the internet

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contributed to the increased cases of cyberbullying [6-7]. Increased cases of cyberbullying were evident in different countries like Malaysia, Korea, and Chine [8-10].

In context of the locale, people from different walks of life experience cyberbullying. The significance of understanding cyberbullying has become important. Especially, in world being transformed by the internet. The more time people spend on the internet the more relevant it is to study cyberbullying and the ramifications it poses for society.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative design. Qualitative research designs are intended to investigate various aspects related to social life [11]. In addition, qualitative research involved the deeper understanding of a social phenomenon. Since the study sought to explore experiences of victims of cyberbullying, a qualitative design best suited the study.

14 participants were purposively selected. An inclusion criterion was set to filter participants and make sure the selected participants provided significant data to the study. From the 14 participants, seven were included for the IDI (in-depth interview) and seven for the focus group. The number of participants was intended as it complies with recommended number as well as reaching data saturation [12]. This was also adhered by other qualitative studies [13-14]. The research instrument used was a semi structured interview guide. The interview guide was designed and evaluated by a panel of experts. The data gathered was then analysed with thematic analysis.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results show that three main categories were generated with various themes embedded within each category. The categories generated are the following: Victim experiences of cyberbullying, Victim coping mechanism of cyberbullying and Victim insights of cyberbullying.

3.1 Victim experiences of cyberbullying

Table 1 shows the results for code category 1(Victim experiences of cyberbullying). Results detail the experiences of victims relative to cyberbullying. Specifically, the experiences are elaborated into three main themes: More time on social media, Forms of cyberbullying and Lowers self-esteem.

Table 1. Victim experiences of cyberbullying

Code category 1	Themes	Core Idea
Victim experiences of cyberbullying	More time on social media	• Using social media is my daily routine • Posting a lot of photos since I have a lot of free time. • Logging in twitter after I am done with school activities.

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	Forms of cyberbullying	• getting offensive comments from my posts • receiving malicious statements from unknown people • getting pranked by classmates • getting body shamed
	Lowers self-esteem	• feeling humiliated • losing confidence in class • inability to feel joy

The first theme generated under Victim experiences is More time on social media. Since people were forced to stay home, people had so much time on their hands. Reporting physically for work and school were suspended which likely contributed to the increased numbers of social media use. Table 1 revealed that the victims of cyberbullying had more time on social. Social media became part of their daily routine. This is expected because people now had a lot of time to do other things. A participant even shared that posting a lot of photos on Facebook is possible because of so much free time. There were even students who used twitter after completing school tasks. This increased usage of the victims could have been a contributing factor for their experience as victims of cyberbullying. The more posts they make attracted cyberbullies and made them as prime targets for ridicule and harassment. Studies even confirm frequent users of the internet are more likely to become victims of cyberbullies [15].

The second theme generated under Victim experiences is Forms of cyberbullying. The victims of cyberbullying were able to share various instances relative to the form of cyberbullying. There were those got offensive comments from their posts. The kind of comments that ridiculed the victim for their errors in grammar. There are even instances wherein the victim would receive malicious statements from unknown people. Social media platforms allow anonymity, this enables some people to send messages maliciously [16]. One participant even shared that cyberbullies resorted to body shaming. Such experiences are some of the forms of cyberbullying experienced by the participants. Consequently, victims of cyberbullying end up with a lowered self-esteem.

The third theme generated under Victim experience is Lowers self-esteem. As victims experienced cyberbullying, it has made feel negative thoughts. Participants shared that after being cyberbullied, they felt humiliated. Similarly, participants from other studies about cyberbullying also shared a similar sentiment [17]. The feeling of humiliation stems from a feeling of degradation of the victim as cyberbullying damages the pride and dignity of a person [18]. Moreover, participants even shared that students lose their confidence in class after the experience. Cyberbullying even takes away the feeling of joy.

3.2 Victim coping mechanism of cyberbullying

Table 2 presents the results for code category 2(Victim coping mechanism of cyberbullying). Results detail the coping mechanism of victims relative to cyberbullying. Specifically, two themes were generated: Support system from family and friends and taking a break.

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Table 2. Victim coping mechanism of cyberbullying

Code category 2	Themes	Core Idea
Victim coping mechanism of cyberbullying	Support system from family and friends	• Asking advice from parents • Sharing experience with close friends
	Taking a break	• Decreasing social media posts • Giving myself time to reflect and rest • Staying away from social media

The first coping mechanism uncovered from the Victim experience of cyberbullying is Support system from family and friends. To manage the painful experience, victims of cyberbullying turn to a reliable support system. In this case, the participants rely on their family and friends. Participants stated that they ask advice from their parents. Following the advice of parents is practical because parents possess experiential wisdom [19]. Aside from the support of parents, participants sought the support of friends. Sharing the experience with close friends reduces the stigma from their experience of cyberbullying [20]. In fact, this is a common practice for cyberbullied children [21]. Studies show that friends help reduce anxiety and even provide protection to victims of bullying and cyberbullying alike [22-23].

The second coping mechanism uncovered from the Victim experience of cyberbullying is Taking a break. The more time people spend online the more likely they will experience cyberbullying [24-25]. Receiving painful comments on social media can have adverse effects on the mental health of a person [26]. As such, detaching from social media is recommended as it promotes wellbeing [27]. Participants shared varying forms of taking a break. Some participants opted to decrease social media posts while other participants gave themselves time to reflect and rest. There were also participants that stayed away from using social media.

3.3 Victim insights of cyberbullying.

Table 3 presents the results for code category 2(Victim insights of cyberbullying). Participants shared varying insights from their experience. From their experience, three themes were generated: Mindfulness of actions, Positive mindset and Educate the majority.

Table 3. Victim insights of cyberbullying.

Code category 2	Themes	Core Idea
Victim insights of cyberbullying	Mindfulness of actions	• Being cautious in using social media • Thinking twice before posting on social media
	Positive mindset	• Diverting your energy to something productive • Avoiding negative thoughts • Being resilient
	Educate the majority	• Advocating for a safe space

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		• Orienting the youth • Providing information drive

The first insight is Mindfulness of actions. Participants imparted that people should be cautious when using social media. Social media is vast and cyberbullies are abound with the intent of inflicting harmful actions to unsuspecting users [28]. Other participants shared to think twice before posting. The posting of personal opinions has the tendency to exacerbate trending topics. In addition, comments that ignite emotions are even likely to attract more responses [29-30]. Given that social media serves as a conduit to further fuel and harass victims, social media users must be mindful to their respective posts on social media [31].

The second insight derived from the participants is Positive mindset. Innovations in technology provided great benefits however it also came together with the proliferation of cyberbullying [32]. Participants shared that a positive mindset is necessary so that victims of cyberbullying will aid towards a positive mental health. Similarly, a positive mindset is vital for a person's well-being [33]. Participants of this study shared that a positive mindset can be demonstrated through diverting energy to something productive, avoiding negative thoughts and being resilient.

Finally, the third insight is Educate the majority. Cyberbullying continuous to flourish as technology thrives [32]. The importance of educating people on cyberbullying has garnered a considerable attention. This phenomenon needs to be understood for people to empathize with those who were victims of cyberbullying. Empathy is fundamental to prevent cyberbullying [34]. Participants shared that advocating for a safe space. Everyone has a role in dealing with cyberbullying. A multifaceted solution can be used to deal with cyberbullying. This includes Psychology, Education, IT media and even linguistics [35]. The more advocates involved the safer the environment becomes. In addition. The youth can be oriented as well as providing information drives. The goal of educating the majority should not be limited to cyberbullying awareness but also promote "cyber-kindess" to foster a kind and safe virtual space [35].

4. CONCLUSION

The study provided a focused description of the experiences, coping mechanism and insights of the people who experienced cyberbullying. Each code category detailed relevant concepts relative to the phenomenon of cyberbullying. This allows a better understanding of the cyberbullying. Moreover, understanding cyberbullying is necessary for awareness and even promoting a safe space for everyone. Everyone has a shared role in dealing with cyberbullying so that the detrimental effects can be mitigated.

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