Uncovering the Prevalence and Consequences of Cyberbullying Among Female Students as Virtual Violence in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study, titled "Uncovering the Prevalence and Consequences of Cyberbullying Among Female Students as Virtual Violence in Bangladesh," aims to assess the prevalence, identify common forms, examine impacts, and develop policy recommendations for addressing cyberbullying. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from an online survey of 90 female students from the University of Dhaka and Eden Mohila College with qualitative data from 10 detailed case studies. The findings reveal that 66.6% of respondents are from middle-income families, 24.4% from higher-income families, and 8% from lower-income families. Alarmingly, all respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying or harassment online, with 72% victimized weekly and 86% daily. Inappropriate comments were encountered by 83.3%, primarily on Facebook (87.77%), Messenger (76%) and others chat-based app and online website. The psychological impact is significant, with 7.8% of respondents experiencing high levels of depression and 48.8% suffering from sleep disturbances. Additionally, 43 respondents reported a reduction in their reputation due to online harassment. The study underscores the urgent need for enhanced digital literacy and awareness, recommending initiatives by the government and the ICT division of Bangladesh to mitigate the effects of cyberbullying.

Keywords: Prevalence; Consequences; Cyberbullying; Female; Students Etc

1. Introduction

In the digital era, the internet has transfigured communication, providing unparalleled opportunities for connectivity and information exchange. However, alongside these benefits, a darker

phenomenon has emerged: virtual violence. Cyberbullying and virtual violence, particularly targeting women, have become pervasive issues in many societies, including Bangladesh. This rising trend of digital abuse presents unique challenges that are often more insidious and far-reaching than traditional forms of harassment.

In Bangladesh, where internet penetration and social media usage have surged in recent years, the incidence of Cyberbullying and women harassment has escalated alarmingly. Victim-blaming attitudes further discourage reporting and seeking help, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and silence **(Nasreen, 2020).** The anonymity and wide reach of digital platforms have emboldened perpetrators, making it easier to target individuals without immediate repercussions. Women, in particular, find themselves disproportionately affected, facing a barrage of threats, abusive language, and invasion of privacy that can lead to severe psychological distress and social isolation **(Bauman, 2013).**

This research aims to explore the underlying factors contributing to the rise of cyberbullying and women harassment in Bangladesh, examining the social, cultural, and technological contexts that enable these behaviors. By analyzing current data, case studies, and legal frameworks, this study seeks to shed light on the magnitude of the problem and the effectiveness of existing measures to combat it. Furthermore, it aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and digital platform providers to create safer online environments and support victims of virtual violence. It becomes evident that tackling virtual violence requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society to foster a culture of empathy, accountability, and digital literacy.

2. Problem Statements

The spread of internet access and social media usage in Bangladesh has brought significant socio-economic benefits, yet it has also given rise to a disturbing trend of virtual violence. Cyberbullying and online harassment, particularly targeting women, have become increasingly prevalent. Despite the growing awareness of this issue, the full extent of its impact remains inadequately understood and addressed. Women in Bangladesh face a myriad of online threats, including cyberstalking and sexual harassment, which lead to severe psychological trauma, phobia, social alienation, and, in some cases, physical harm **(Jane, 2017).** The anonymity afforded by digital platforms emboldens perpetrators and complicates efforts to hold them accountable. In Bangladesh, where mental health resources are scarce and stigmatized, the social isolation and emotional toll on women are particularly severe **(Ahmed, 2018).**

Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive data and research focusing on the specific dynamics and consequences of Cyberbullying and women harassment in the Bangladeshi context. Legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are often insufficient, leaving victims with limited recourse and support. Moreover, societal attitudes towards gender and technology can exacerbate the problem, as cultural stigmas and victim-blaming further deter women from seeking help **(Khatun, 2021).**

This research seeks to address these gaps by systematically investigating the prevalence, forms, and effects of virtual violence against women in Bangladesh. By doing so, it aims to provide a clearer understanding of the issue and inform the development of effective policies and interventions to combat cyberbullying and virtual violence towards female students, ensuring a safer online environment for all.

3. Study Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate and uncovering the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying among female students as virtual violence in Bangladesh. To achieve this, the study also focused on the following specific objectives:

i) To gather socio-demographic information and assess the prevalence of cyberbullying as virtual violence;

ii) To identify common forms of cyberbullying faced by female students;

iii) To examine the psychological, social and academic impacts of cyberbullying;

iv) To understand societal attitudes and cultural factors related to cyberbullying; and

v) To promote advocacy and support for victims and develop recommendations for policy and practice.

4. Study Rationality

The proposed study on the rise of cyberbullying to women harassment in Bangladesh as virtual violence is essential for some valid justification. Growing Prevalence and Severity of cyberbullying is alarming. With the rapid increase in internet penetration and social media usage in Bangladesh, incidents of cyberbullying and harassment targeting women have surged. Despite this rise, there remains a significant gap in empirical data and comprehensive research dedicated to understanding the scope and nature of this virtual violence. Addressing this gap is critical to formulating effective responses. In Bangladesh, gender norms often dictate limited digital literacy and awareness among women, making them more vulnerable to online abuse **(Haque et al., 2019).** Cyberbullying and women harassment are often underreported due to fear of stigma, victim-blaming, and lack of trust in the legal and institutional frameworks. This study aims to bring these hidden issues to light, providing a clearer picture of the challenges faced by women in the digital realm.

The psychological trauma and social isolation resulting from cyberbullying and harassment can have profound and long-lasting effects on victims. Understanding these impacts is vital for developing appropriate mental health support services and intervention strategies. There is a pressing need to raise awareness about the dangers of cyberbullying and harassment and to educate the public, especially women, about digital safety and rights. This study will offer valuable insights and recommendations for educational programs and awareness campaigns. The findings from this study will have direct implications for policymakers, digital platform providers, educators, and civil society organizations. By offering evidence-based recommendations, the study will contribute to the development of effective policies and practical solutions to combat virtual violence.

5. Methodology

The present study has employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitatively, an online sample survey was conducted targeting purposively selected women from University of Dhaka and Eden Mohila College totaling 90 participants. Qualitatively, case study method has been utilized, examining 10 cases. Data from both primary and secondary sources has been used in this study. Data collection involved face-to-face interviews and observations guided by pre-tested interview guidelines. Thematic analysis was conducted using SPSS data analysis application. The study adhered to research principles and ethical values throughout its execution.

Table 01. Summarized Methodology of this Study

Approaches	Methods	Sample Size	Data Collection Techniques	Data Collection Tools	Data Sauces	Analysis Application
Quantitative	Sample Survey	90	Face to face interview and observation	Structural Interview Schedule	Both Primary and Secondary	SPSS and MS Excel Worksheet
Qualitative	Case Study	10	Face to face interview and observation	Interview Guideline (Open-ended)		Thematic Analysis
Study Location: University of Dhaka and Eden Mohila College						
Sampling Techniques: Purposive/ Judgement of Researchers						
Population: All women students from public university in Dhaka City.						

6. Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory provides a critical lens for examining how power dynamics and gender inequalities shape the experiences of women online. It highlights how cyberbullying and harassment are manifestations of broader patriarchal structures that seek to control and oppress women. This perspective is essential for understanding why women are disproportionately targeted and how cultural norms and societal attitudes in Bangladesh exacerbate these issues **(Butler, 1990; hooks, 2000).**

Theories related to psychological impact and coping, such as Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, are crucial for understanding the effects of cyberbullying on victims. These theories explain how individuals perceive and respond to stressors, highlighting the emotional and psychological toll of online harassment on women. This framework aids in identifying effective support mechanisms and interventions to help victims cope with and recover from their experiences **(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).**

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the rise of Cyberbullying and women harassment in Bangladesh as virtual violence. These theories offer valuable insights into the behaviors of perpetrators, the experiences of victims, and the broader societal and cultural factors at play. This theoretical framework will guide the research methodology and analysis, ensuring a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the issue.

7.Study Findings and Discussion

The present study has followed thematic analysis model. Theme for this study has been selected on the basis of study objective and interview guidelines. The following part has presented the study findings and its discussion. Data triangulation approach also has been used in proper way.

7.1 Socio-Demographic Information

This part of findings showed about Socio-Demographic Information about cyberbullying victim women in Bangladesh.

Table 02. Institutional Representation of Respondents

Institutions	Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Dhaka University	60	66.6
Eden Mohila College	30	33.4

The majority (66.6%) of respondents are from Dhaka University, indicating a higher likelihood of exposure to digital platforms and potential cyberbullying and violence incidents. However, respondents from Eden Mohila College (33.4%) also provide valuable insights into experiences from another educational institution.

Table 03. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Respondents (N=90)	Percentage
Unmarried	78	86.6
Married	12	13.4

The predominance of unmarried (86.6%) respondents suggests that young adults, who are often more active on social media, comprise a significant portion of the sample. Unmarried individuals may be more vulnerable to online harassment due to their increased presence on digital platforms. Married women also face cyberbullying and this study has resented 13.4% married women from educational institution who are victim of cyberbullying.

30 respondents from arts, 30 respondents from business and 30 respondents from science responses about their experience on Cyberbullying in this study that make percentage ration of 33.3:33.3:33.3. The equal distribution of respondents across arts, business, and science backgrounds ensures a diverse representation of students with varying levels of digital literacy and online engagement.

The higher percentage (61.11%) of respondents from the south zone of Bangladesh potentially influencing the prevalence of cyberbullying and harassment. 38.88% responses come from the respondents who come from the district located in north zone of Bangladesh.

The distribution across different income levels provides insights into how socio-economic status intersects with experiences of virtual violence. Lower-income respondents may face unique challenges in accessing resources for coping with cyberbullying, while higher-income respondents may encounter different forms of online harassment due to their visibility and influence. 66.6% respondents 60 responses come from middle income family and 24.4% from higher income family and 8 responses found from lower income family background.

The universal use of smartphones among respondents underscores the pervasive nature of digital technology in their lives, highlighting the importance of addressing cyberbullying and women harassment in online spaces accessible through mobile devices. This study found that total 90 respondents use smart phone that consist 100%.

7.2 Prevalence and Frequency of Cyberbullying and Harassment Incidents

This study found that all respondents (100%) experienced cyberbullying or harassment via online media. Cyberbullying and harassment are widespread issues among women university students in Bangladesh. The fact that every respondent reported experiencing these incidents indicates that it is a common part of their online experience. The high prevalence may suggest that cyberbullying and harassment have become normalized to an extent where it is almost an expected part of being online for these students. This normalization can have severe implications for mental health and well-being. Even with 100% reporting experiencing cyberbullying or harassment, there might be aspects or severity levels that are underreported due to fear of stigma, lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, or other reasons. This indicates that the actual situation might be even worse than reported.

Table 04. Frequency of Cyberbullying

Type of Incident	Frequency (N=90)	Percentage (%)
Daily	78	86.7
Weekly	65	72.2
Monthly	90	100
Occasionally	8	8.9

Multipole Responses

The majority of respondents (86.7%) experience cyberbullying or harassment daily, while all respondents report experiencing it at least monthly. Weekly 72% female students are worst victim of cyberbullying. This indicates a high frequency of incidents among the population.

Table 05. Types of Cyberbullying Experienced

Types	Frequency (N=90)	Percentage (%)
Threatening messages	32	35.6
Inappropriate comments	75	83.3
Spreading rumors	12	13.3
Sharing personal information	15	16.7
Stalking or repeated unwanted contact	46	51.1
Hacking or impersonation	22	24.4
Sexual harassment	38	42.2
Others (fake video, fake voice, Screen Shot)	12	13.3

Multipole Responses

Inappropriate Comments (83.3%): This is the most commonly experienced form of cyberbullying among the respondents, indicating a widespread issue of receiving disrespectful or offensive remarks online.

Stalking or Repeated Unwanted Contact (51.1%): Over half of the respondents reported experiencing stalking or repeated unwanted contact, showing a significant problem with persistent and intrusive behavior online.

Sexual Harassment (42.2%): This form of harassment is reported by a considerable proportion of respondents, highlighting serious issues of sexual misconduct in the online environment.

Threatening Messages (35.6%): More than a third of respondents received threatening messages, suggesting a prevalent use of intimidation tactics in cyberbullying.

Hacking or Impersonation (24.4%): Nearly a quarter of respondents experienced hacking or impersonation, pointing to issues with account security and privacy breaches.

Sharing Personal Information (16.7%): The sharing of personal information without consent affects a smaller but notable portion of respondents, indicating risks to personal privacy and safety.

Spreading Rumors (13.3%) and Other Forms (13.3%): These less common but still significant types of cyberbullying involve malicious gossip and other harmful activities like fake videos or voice clips, impacting the victim's reputation and well-being.

Table 06. Medium of Cyberbullying for Online Harassment of Women

Social media	Frequency (N=90)	Percentage
Facebook	79	87.77
Messenger	67	74.44
Instagram	47	52.22
WhatsApp	42	46.66
TikTok	7	7.77
Others Chat based App	15	16.66
• Multipole responses		

Facebook (87.77%): This platform is the most frequently cited medium for cyberbullying, suggesting it is the primary site of online interaction and hence a significant source of harassment for women university students.

Messenger (74.44%): Closely following Facebook, Messenger is also a major medium for cyberbullying, likely due to its integration with Facebook and its widespread use for direct messaging.

Instagram (52.22%): Over half of the respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying on Instagram, indicating that visual social media platforms are also significant sites for online harassment.

WhatsApp (46.66%): Almost half of the respondents have experienced cyberbullying on WhatsApp, highlighting that private messaging apps are also vulnerable to harassment activities.

TikTok (7.77%) and Other Chat-based Apps (16.66%): These platforms are less commonly cited but still notable mediums for cyberbullying. The lower percentages may reflect varying usage patterns among the respondents.

7.3 Psycho-social Impact

This study found various type of psychologic and social impact of women due to Cyberbullying through online media. The following type of psychological problem faced by the women for Cyberbullying-

- Anxiety and Stress
- Depression
- Low Self-Esteem
- Isolation and Loneliness
- Withdrawal from Social Interactions
- PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- Increased Risk of Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors
- Emotional Distress
- Paranoia
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Sleep Disturbances

Cyberbullying has profound psychological impacts on women, affecting their mental health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. Addressing these impacts requires comprehensive

mental health support, including counseling, peer support groups, and proactive measures to prevent and respond to cyberbullying incidents. Creating a safe and supportive environment is crucial to mitigating these psychological effects and helping victims recover.

Table 07. Intensity of Psychological Impact of Respondents

Type	*Impact Intensity*					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Anxiety and Stress	32	44	10	4	0	90
Depression	23	28	32	7	0	90
Low Self-Esteem	16	22	32	12	8	90
Isolation and Loneliness	40	26	22	2	0	90
PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)	56	27	5	2	0	90
Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors	64	6	2	3	0	85
Emotional Distress	33	26	22	6	3	90
Paranoia	23	30	25	5	2	85
Sleep Disturbances	17	23	40	6	4	90
1= Very Low, 2= Low, 3= Moderate, 4= High, 5= Very High, 6=Total (N=90)						

Table 07 shows the intensity of impact to women about online harassment or Cyberbullying. In 5 level scale the study respondents' responses their feelings and emotion. About anxiety and stress 44 respondents' marks on low level intensity of psychological impact and 10 respondents said their moderate level impact. Most important that 4 respondents marked high level impact of anxiety and stress due to bullying in online media. This study found that High Level of Depression 7 out of 90 respondents (7.8%) is alarming. A small but significant proportion of respondents experience high levels of depression due to cyberbullying. This indicates that cyberbullying can lead to severe emotional distress, contributing to prolonged periods of sadness and hopelessness among victims. Low self-esteem is a prominent issue, with 21 out of 90 respondents (22.2%) experiencing it at high or very high levels. This suggests that cyberbullying significantly damages the self-worth and confidence of the victims, leading them to feel inadequate and undervalued. Isolation and loneliness are experienced by a notable number of respondents, with 24.4% reporting moderate levels and a smaller percentage experiencing it at high levels. This indicates that while not all victims feel extremely isolated, a substantial proportion feel moderately disconnected from their social environment. PTSD is observed in a subset of respondents, with 7.8% experiencing it at moderate to high levels. This highlights the potential for cyberbullying to cause long-term psychological trauma and severe anxiety in victims. The presence of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in 3.3% of respondents underscores the extreme impact cyberbullying can have on mental health. This is a critical area of concern, indicating the need for urgent mental health support and interventions. Emotional distress is significant, with 10% of respondents experiencing it at high or very high levels. This reflects the intense and overwhelming negative emotions that cyberbullying victims often endure. Sleep disturbances are a major issue, with nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) experiencing them at moderate to very high levels. This suggests that cyberbullying severely disrupts victims' sleep patterns, leading to insomnia, nightmares, and other sleep-related issues.

The psychological impacts of cyberbullying on women university students in Bangladesh are profound and multifaceted, ranging from continuous fear and anxiety to severe psychological trauma and suicidal thoughts. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive mental health support, including counseling, awareness programs, and strong anti-cyberbullying policies.

The study on cyberbullying among women university students in Bangladesh reveals a range of severe psychological impacts. Below is a summarized overview of these impacts, supplemented with case quotations to illustrate the experiences of the respondents.

Continuous Fear and Worry: Victims experience heightened levels of anxiety and stress, leading to constant fear and worry. This persistent state of anxiety can interfere with daily activities and overall well-being.

Case A said,

"Every time I receive a notification, my heart races. I'm always worried it could be another threatening message or inappropriate comment."

Feelings of Hopelessness and Sadness: Prolonged exposure to cyberbullying leads to clinical depression, characterized by feelings of overwhelming sadness and hopelessness. Victims may lose interest in activities they once enjoyed.

Case A again said,

"I feel so hopeless and sad all the time. The bullying makes me feel like there's no way out."

Erosion of Self-Worth: Repeated negative comments and harassment significantly damage self-esteem. Victims internalize the criticism, leading to a negative self-image and diminished self-worth.

Case B said,

"I used to be confident, but now I doubt myself constantly. The harsh words have made me feel worthless."

Withdrawal from Social Interactions: To avoid further harassment, victims often withdraw from social interactions, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. This social withdrawal cuts them off from supportive networks.

Case D said,

"I've stopped going out with friends. I just can't face anyone anymore because of the things being said about me online."

Psychological Trauma: Severe cyberbullying can cause long-term psychological trauma, manifesting as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Symptoms include flashbacks, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the harassment.

Desperation and Hopelessness: The extreme emotional toll of cyberbullying can lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Victims feel trapped and unable to escape the harassment, leading to desperation.

Case E said,

"Sometimes, the pain is so intense that I think the only way out is to end it all. The bullying makes me feel like I have no future."

Constant Emotional Upset: Victims experience a wide range of negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and helplessness. This constant emotional turmoil affects their mental health and stability.

Case F said,

"I'm always on edge, angry, and frustrated. The bullying has turned my life upside down emotionally."

Insomnia and Nightmares: Anxiety and stress from cyberbullying disrupt sleep patterns, causing insomnia and nightmares. Poor sleep exacerbates other psychological symptoms, creating a vicious cycle of mental health issues.

Case H said in this regard,

"I can't sleep properly. Every night, I lie awake, haunted by nightmares of the bullying."

Strained Friendships: respondents in this study experienced strained relationships with friends and peers due to the negative content being spread about them online. Trust has eroded, leading to social isolation of victim girl. About 64% respondents support with this impact.

Withdrawal from Social Activities: This study found that women withdraw from social activities and events to avoid further harassment. This isolation led them to feelings of loneliness and detachment from social circles.

Harm to Reputation: Cyberbullying often involves spreading rumors, sharing personal information, or posting inappropriate content, which can damage a woman's reputation both online and offline. This study investigates on this issue and found 43 women reduced their previous reputation due to online harassment.

Impact on Academic Life: 90 respondents that consist 100% opined that victim through online platform has huge impact on academic life.

Case C said,

"I can not concentrate after my last Facebook post where lots of friends comment me in negative way about my dress and pose. It's very tough to concentrate on table for study when I feel I bound to delete my FB post for some friends of mine, especially girls."

8. Study Recommendations

This study, titled "Uncovering the Prevalence and Consequences of Cyberbullying Among Female Students as Virtual Violence in Bangladesh," highlights the urgent need for policy and practical interventions to address the pervasive issue of cyberbullying. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to promote advocacy and support for victims:

I. Develop Comprehensive Cyberbullying Policies

Legislation and Enforcement: Strengthen existing laws and regulations to explicitly address cyberbullying. Ensure strict enforcement and timely legal recourse for victims.

Institutional Policies: Educational institutions should develop and implement clear policies on cyberbullying, including reporting mechanisms, support systems, and disciplinary actions.

II. Enhance Digital Literacy and Awareness Programs

Educational Campaigns: Launch nationwide campaigns to educate students, parents, and educators about the dangers of cyberbullying, safe online behavior, and available support resources.

School Curriculum: Integrate digital literacy and cyber ethics into the school curriculum to empower students with the knowledge to navigate online spaces safely.

III. Provide Psychological and Emotional Support

Counseling Services: Establish dedicated counseling services in educational institutions to provide immediate and ongoing psychological support for victims of cyberbullying.

Helplines and Support Groups: Create helplines and online support groups where victims can seek help, share experiences, and receive emotional support in a safe environment.

IV. Promote Safe Online Spaces

Platform Accountability: Work with social media companies to enhance their policies on cyberbullying, ensuring quick removal of abusive content and banning repeat offenders.

Safety Features: Encourage the development and use of safety features on digital platforms, such as blocking, reporting, and privacy settings, to protect users from harassment.

V. Engage Community and Stakeholders

Parental Involvement: Educate parents about the signs of cyberbullying and the importance of open communication with their children regarding online activities.

Collaboration with NGOs: Partner with non-governmental organizations to provide resources, support, and advocacy for victims of cyberbullying.

VI. Regular Monitoring and Research

Data Collection: Conduct regular surveys and studies to monitor the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying, ensuring that policies and interventions are evidence-based and effective.

Impact Assessment: Regularly assess the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs, making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes for victims.

Implementation Strategy

a) *Government Initiatives:* The government, particularly the ICT division, should take the lead in implementing these recommendations by providing the necessary funding, resources, and policy support.

b) *Public-Private Partnerships:* Foster partnerships between the public sector, private companies, and civil society organizations to create a comprehensive and sustainable approach to combating cyberbullying.

c) *Awareness and Training Programs:* Implement awareness and training programs across educational institutions, workplaces, and community centers to ensure widespread understanding and engagement.

By adopting these recommendations, Bangladesh can create a safer online environment for female students and significantly reduce the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying and virtual violence.

Concluding Remarks

This study reveals the alarming extent and severe impact of cyberbullying on female students. With 100% of respondents experiencing some form of online harassment, predominantly through Facebook and Messenger, the findings highlight a significant public health concern. The psychological toll, including high levels of depression and sleep disturbances, underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures. By enhancing digital literacy, enforcing stricter cyberbullying policies, providing psychological support, and fostering safe online environments, stakeholders can mitigate the effects of virtual violence and support victims more effectively. The study calls for coordinated efforts from the government, educational institutions, and digital platforms to create a safer, more supportive digital landscape for all.

Acknowledgements

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