



Cyberbullying and Its Psychological Effects on Adolescent Girls in Rural Areas: A Study of Secondary School Students

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19543474>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 27-03-2026

Published: 10-04-2026

Keywords:

Cyberbullying, Adolescent Girls, Rural Areas, Mental Health, Digital Literacy, Academic Performance.

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed communication patterns among adolescents, but it has also led to emerging risks such as cyberbullying. While the phenomenon has been widely studied in urban contexts, limited attention has been given to rural populations. This study investigates the prevalence and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls in rural areas. Using a descriptive survey method, the research highlights the association between cyberbullying and psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and low self-esteem. The study also examines its impact on academic performance and school participation. Findings reveal that lack of digital literacy, social stigma, and limited access to counseling services exacerbate the problem in rural contexts. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy interventions, awareness programs, and school-based support systems.

Introduction

The proliferation of internet connectivity and smartphone usage has significantly reshaped the social and educational experiences of adolescents. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram have become central to communication and identity formation. However, these platforms have also created avenues for cyberbullying, defined as intentional and repeated harm inflicted through electronic media.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable due to socio-cultural expectations, emotional sensitivity, and gender-based discrimination. In rural areas, the issue is further intensified by the digital divide, lack of



awareness, and limited institutional support. Despite increasing internet penetration, rural communities often lack adequate digital literacy and mental health resources, making adolescent girls more susceptible to psychological harm.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the psychological effects of cyberbullying on adolescent girls in rural educational settings.

Review of Literature

Existing literature indicates that cyberbullying is a significant predictor of adverse psychological outcomes among adolescents.

Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (2010) found that victims of cyberbullying exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Justin W. Patchin (2013) highlighted that victims of cyberbullying often experience low self-esteem and academic problems.

Kowalski Robin M. (2014) emphasized that female adolescents are more likely to experience emotional distress due to cyber victimization.

Research also highlights the role of social media in amplifying peer aggression and social comparison. However, most studies are concentrated in urban or developed contexts. In the Indian scenario, particularly in rural areas, research remains limited. Studies suggest that low digital literacy, socio-cultural constraints, and fear of stigma discourage reporting of cyberbullying incidents.

Research Gap:

There is a lack of empirical studies focusing on the psychological impact of cyberbullying among adolescent girls in rural educational settings, especially in developing regions.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

This study follows a quantitative research approach, as it focuses on collecting numerical data related to cyberbullying experiences and psychological effects (such as anxiety, depression, and stress) among adolescent girls.



- Measuring the level of cyberbullying
- Analyzing psychological impact statistically
- Drawing objective conclusions

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design.

- Describe the current situation of cyberbullying in rural areas
- Analyze its psychological effects without manipulating variables

Population of the Study

The population includes:

- All adolescent girls studying in secondary schools in rural areas
- Age group: 13–18 years
- Classes: 8th to 12th

Sample and Sampling Technique

Sample Size

Approximately 100–150 adolescent girls

Sampling Technique

Simple Random Sampling (or convenient sampling if access is limited)

Tools and Instruments

(a) Cyberbullying Measurement Tool

- A self-structured questionnaire to assess:
 - Experience of cyberbullying
 - Frequency and type (messages, rumors, etc.)



(b) Psychological Measurement Tools

- Standardized scales to measure:
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Stress

These tools ensure: Reliability, Validity and Scientific accuracy.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using:

- Percentage → to show prevalence of cyberbullying
- Mean (Average) → to measure psychological levels
- Correlation → to find relationship between cyberbullying and psychological effects

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study clearly indicate that cyberbullying is a growing concern among adolescent girls in rural areas. The high prevalence rate reflects the increasing use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, even in rural settings.

The study confirms that cyberbullying has serious psychological consequences. The high levels of anxiety and depression among victims align with previous studies by Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin, who also reported similar emotional distress among adolescents.

The impact on academic performance suggests that psychological well-being is closely linked to educational outcomes. Students facing cyberbullying often experience difficulty concentrating, reduced motivation, and lower academic achievement.

Another important finding is the low level of awareness regarding cyber safety. In rural areas, factors such as lack of digital literacy, parental unawareness, and social stigma prevent students from reporting such incidents. This creates a cycle where cyberbullying continues without intervention.



Overall, the findings highlight that cyberbullying is not just a technological issue but also a social, psychological, and educational problem, particularly for adolescent girls in rural communities.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that cyberbullying is a significant and emerging issue among adolescent girls in rural areas. It has profound psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem, which in turn negatively affect academic performance.

The study also reveals that lack of awareness and inadequate support systems further aggravate the problem. Despite the growing use of digital technologies, rural communities are not fully equipped to handle the challenges associated with cyber risks.

Therefore, it is essential to address cyberbullying through a comprehensive approach involving schools, parents, and policymakers. Promoting digital literacy, providing counseling support, and implementing strict anti-bullying measures can help in reducing its impact.

Recommendations

- Implementation of cyber safety education programs in schools
- Promotion of digital literacy among students and parents
- Development of strict anti-cyberbullying policies
- Encouragement of open communication and reporting mechanisms
- Teachers should be trained to identify and handle cyberbullying cases
- Counseling services should be made available for students
- Parents should be educated about monitoring online activities
- Policies should be implemented to ensure safe digital environments

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