

Youth and Cyber Harassment: Reporting Mechanism of Cyber Harassment by the KPK Universities Students

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Abstract

This research article provides insight into the issue of online harassment with reference to the young internet users in Pakistan. Victims of online harassment can get help from different people. The question is how much they are satisfied with the responses of those people and authorities to whom they have reported the incidents. The researcher interviewed 800 students of six leading universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through a closed ended questionnaire. Hypotheses were tested through statistical procedures. Results revealed that age is a significant factor of cyber harassment. Results also suggested that young internet users inform family members more often than officials due to higher rate of satisfaction from the responses of earlier than former.

Key words: cyber harassment, reporting mechanism, universities students.

Introduction

Over the last several years, youth have benefited from the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT), including increased access to the Internet and mobile phones (Faucher, Jackson, and Cassidy 2014). Along with the beneficial outcomes of ICT, various threats have also been found to accompany this "wave of digital interactive communication" such as cyber harassment. This new form of harassment which involves the use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, websites, mobile phones or other forms of information technology to deliberately harass, threaten, or intimidate someone (Sittichai and Smith 2018). Cyber harassment has appeared to be a hidden social problem (Kim et al. 2018) and social media is the most common place in which cyber harassment takes place (Duggan 2017). This includes the spreading of harmful lies, giving rude or threatening remarks against individuals, spreading of humiliating rumours, posting of photographs or uploading videos intended to embarrass others (Marganski and Melander 2018, Marret and Choo 2017). Cyber harassment, cyber-bullying and cyber stalking are generally used interchangeably in the literature having no clear definitional differences. Previous literature has also treated cyber

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bullying and cyber stalking as kinds of cyber harassment. Therefore, this study also conceptualizes these terms under one heading of 'cyber harassment'.

Due to the possible negative effects of cyber harassment, it is important that individuals seek help by reporting cyber harassment incidents to a helpful adult (Cowie, 2013). But studies have shown that compared to victims of traditional harassment, children and adolescent cyber victims are actually even less likely to seek help and report incidents (Wozencroft et al. 2015). Then question arises, that why there is difference between the reporting of the two similar crimes with different places? One possible reason for this is the level of satisfaction from the people to whom the incidents of cyber harassment was reported. One can hypothesis that negative satisfaction can stop the victim from reporting incidents in future, while positive satisfaction can encourage them.

Similarly, cyber harassment has often been reported in Pakistan (Mohsin 2016). In Pakistan, there is scarcity of data on the topic. The Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) Pakistan has stated that in 2015 only five percent of cyber harassment cases were reported and proceeded by any kind of legal action (Zahid and Dad 2017). But this phenomenon needs further investigation. Therefore, the current study aimed to explore the online harassment of youth in Pakistan, and how much they are satisfied from the responses of those to whom they reported incidents of cyber harassment.

Methodology

This study adopted cross-sectional survey research method to explore the phenomenon. The data was collected from the students of six leading universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Student data was obtained from their respective universities. The total number of students enrolled at the time was 51887. The sample of 800 students was selected using stratified sampling method. A close-ended questionnaire measuring the concepts of the study was distributed among the selected sample. To ensure that respondents fill the questionnaire appropriately, each questionnaire was administered separately and the respondent was requested to fill the questionnaire at spot so that if any problem they face during the process, the researcher will help them to sort it out.

In this study, cyber harassment is operationalized through seventeen (17) statements, Using five-point Likert scale. The mean score of all these 17 questions were treated the score of an individual's cyber harassment that he/she faced. Cronbach Alpha=.86. For operationalization of reporting of cyber harassment incidences, this study includes four questions (In line with study of Hensler-McGinnis

(2008). Responses to these questions were reverse coded in SPSS to ensure that higher number represent higher level of satisfaction.

Hypotheses

H 1: There is a significant relationship between the age of students and cyber harassment.

H 2: It is more likely that students who informed close people about cyber harassment, they faced, are satisfied from their responses than those who reported it to officials

Results and discussion

To test the first hypothesis, one-way ANOVA was used. No linear collinearity was found. The alpha level is .05. The results are presented in two separate tables 1 and 2. The table 1 gives details about mean and standard deviations of cyber harassment faced by particular age category. The table 2 shows results of ANOVA test.

Table: 1. Age and Cyber Harassment

	Age	N	Mean	SD
Cyber Harassment	15 years to 20 years	114	2.02	.63
	21 years to 25 years	525	1.94	.62
	26 years and above	161	2.12	.70
	Total	800	1.99	.64

Table shows distribution of cyber harassment on the basis of age groups of the respondents. The age groups of the respondents have three categories (group 1= 15 years to 20 years, group 2= 21 years to 25 years and group 3= 26 and above). For cyber harassment, group 3 has slightly higher mean value than group 1 and group 2.

Table: 2. Difference in the chances of cyber harassment victimization of various age groups

		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Cyber harassment	Between Groups	4.00	2	2.00	4.95	.007
	Within Groups	322.38	797	.40		
	Total	326.39	799			

N=800

A one- way ANOVA was conducted to compare the impact of age on Cyber harassment as measured by self-reported survey. There was a statistically significant difference for three age groups for cyber harassment. $F(2,797) = 4.95, p = .007$. Post-hoc comparison using Bonferroni test indicated that mean scores for group two ($M = 1.94, SD = .62$) was significantly different from group three ($M = 2.12; SD = .70$). These results provide support to the first hypothesis of this study (H1) that "there is significant relationship between the age of students and cyber harassment.

a) *Reporting mechanism and satisfaction level*

To test the second hypothesis, Spearman’s rho correlation test was used to find the relationship between reporting of cyber harassment to various people and level of satisfaction from these people. The alpha level is .05. The results are presented in two tables, table 3 and 4. The table 3 is about the reporting of cyber harassment incidents to close people and level of satisfaction from their responses, while the table 4 present the data about reporting of cyber harassment incidents to authorities and level of satisfaction from their responses.

Table: 3 Relationship between reporting of cyber harassment to various people and their level of satisfaction

Reporting	Satisfaction from Friends	Satisfaction from Partner/Spouse	Satisfaction from Family member	Satisfaction from Personal lawyer	Satisfaction from Online friends	Satisfaction from Counsellor/therapist/psychiatrist	Satisfaction from Spiritual counsellor	Satisfaction from Academic advisor/professor/Dept. staff
To friends	.01	-.04	.14*	.25**	.16**	.18**	.15**	.06
To Partner/spouse	.13*	.20*	.18*	-.05	-.067	-.08*	-.08*	-.20**
To family member	.15*	.18*	.30*	.07	.11**	.03	.08*	-.01
To personal lawyer	-.07*	-.01	-.05	.34**	.22**	.20**	.15**	.19**

To online friends	-.01	-.03	.02	.17*	.28*	.18*	.14*	.14*
To counsellor/ therapist/ psychiatrist	.01	-.05	.01	.30**	.25**	.41**	.32**	.18**
To spiritual counsellor	.00	-.06	.01	.30**	.27**	.41**	.37**	.28**
To academic advisor/ professor/ dept. staff	.16*	.15*	-.07	.13**	.10**	.16**	-.07*	.30**

n= 800; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Spearman rho correlation was conducted to compare the mean score for reporting to friends, partner/ spouse, family member, personal lawyer, online friends, counsellor/ therapist/ psychiatrist, spiritual counsellor and academic advisor/ professor/ department staff and their level of satisfaction from these persons. The results are mixed. Reporting to friends and respondent's level of satisfaction with their response has insignificant relationship. Satisfaction level of responses has significant relationship with reporting to partner/spouse ($r = .20, n=800, p < .05$), with family members ($r = .30, n=800, p < .05$), with personal lawyer ($r = -.34, n=800, p < .05$), with online friends ($r = -.28, n=800, p < .05$), with counsellor/ therapist/ psychiatrist ($r = -.41, n=800, p < .05$), with spiritual counsellor ($r = -.37, n=800, p < .05$) and with academic advisor/professor/dept. staff ($r = -.30, n=800, p < .05$). These results suggested that higher level of reporting to partner/spouse, and family member is being associated with higher levels of satisfaction with them. While, higher level of reporting to personal lawyer, online friends, counsellor/ therapist/ psychiatrist, spiritual counsellor, and academic advisor/professor/dept. staff is being associated with lower levels of satisfaction with them.

Table: 4 Relationship between filing complaint to authorities about cyber harassment and their level of satisfaction.

	Satisfaction from Police/FIA	Satisfaction from Court of justice	Satisfaction from Social Media Admin	Satisfaction from Other government agencies	Satisfaction from University administration
Filing a complaint					
With police/FIA	-.14**	.14**	-.08*	-.09*	.12**
In court of justice	-.45**	.49**	-.36**	.41**	.30**
With social media admin	.06	.01	-.08*	.05	-.00
with other government agencies	-.29**	.25**	-.21**	.25**	.16**
With university administration	-.15**	.19**	-.24**	.23**	.24**

N= 800; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Spearman rho correlation was conducted to compare the mean score for filing complaint with authorities (police/FIA, court of justice, social media admin, other government agencies and university administration) and their level of satisfaction from these officials. There was a negative correlation between filing of complaint with authorities and level of respondent's satisfaction from the respective authorities. The satisfaction level of respondents has significant negative relationship with complaint filed with police/FIA ($r = -.14$, $n=800$, $p < .05$), with court of justice ($r = -.49$, $n=800$, $p < .05$), with Social Media admin with ($r = -.08$, $n=800$, $p < .05$), with other government agencies ($r = -.25$, $n=800$, $p < .05$), and with university administration ($r = -.24$, $n=800$, $p < .05$). These findings suggest that higher level of reporting complaint with police and FIA, Court of justice, social media admin, with university administration, and other government agencies is being associated with lower levels of satisfaction with them. These findings support hypothesis (H2) partially that: "It is more likely that students who informed closed people about cyber harassment they faced are satisfied from their responses than those who reported it to officials".

Discussion

We found that age of the students had significant relationship with cyber harassment. Findings of Álvarez-García et al. (2015) also support these findings. Majority of the previous studies are inclined to

agree that receipt and dissemination of unwelcome text, images, video or audio is somewhat common among young people (Crofts et al. 2016, Patrick et al. 2015). What makes these threats as dangerous is that, an online user adds in his friends list those people which are contacted on daily basis by the user in common matters of life (Sowmya and Chatterjee 2018). Disclosing and controlling over personal information may cause irreparable loss to anyone at social level such as feeling disgraced amongst friends, making social irregularities, or just getting ill sense out of good idea due to one's traumatized position (Tuunainen, Pitkänen, and Hovi 2009).

Another important question raised by this study was that how young users of internet react to cyber harassment, once it occurs. Students may react to cyber harassment victimization in different ways.

The current study result showed respondents more often report cyber harassment experience to family members and friends than to officials due to higher rate of satisfaction from the responses from the earlier than the later. Some previous studies lend support to these findings, as Hensler-McGinnis (2008) study revealed that a large majority of university students reported to friends and very small number of them officially reported the incidents. A study of online harassment by Finn (2004) found lower rates of formal reporting. The current study showed negative correlation with reporting to social media admin, personal lawyer, online friends, counsellor/ therapist/ psychiatrist, spiritual counsellor and academic advisor/ professor/ department staff and level of public satisfaction from the respective person.

Most of the survey respondents did not know where to report or get help for internet offenses, and the low rate of reporting for actual offenses confirms this lack of awareness. Even the most serious episodes were rarely reported. Because the internet is new territory, most people do not yet know who the policing authorities are; this may, in fact be part of the attraction. But victims need to know how to get help, and people perpetrators do need to know that there are consequences. Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, and Bartak (2003) observed that satisfaction with social support declined, also highlighted the necessity for these offices and individuals to continue supporting victims over the long haul, as many cyber harassment victims can find it increasingly difficult to obtain the support and understanding they need from their environments.

Policy implications and research suggestions

Use of the Internet is often vital for educational, information, entertainment purposes, and many young people use the Internet to socialize and connect with others, it would be more effective to educate adolescents on the threats present online so they are aware of the potential for harassment.

Youths using the Internet should be educated to only participate in cyber communication with peoples they know and trust. Educational institutions should introduce a separate office to stop cyber harassment of users. People should be informed about Pakistani cyber laws as well the mechanism through which they can sought relief. Also, it is important to remove ambiguities, if any, in the legal structure and to improve the ability of the organizations that are responsible for implementation of cyber laws. Further research can be conducted in other parts of the country. There is a sufficient opportunity for future study in this area by surveying a wider age range of young people, also those in different geographical areas would add to the knowledge base.

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