A Study of "Cyberbullying and Its impact on academic, social and emotional development of undergraduate students". (With special Reference to three selected public universities in Sri Lanka.)

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1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of today's digital era, the internet has emerged as a vital and transformative force, bringing about a profound revolution in our daily lives. It has changed the way people communicate, work and access the information, creating positive and negative outcomes. Cyberbullying is one of the negative outcomes, acts as an extension of traditional bullying that occurs through electronic devices, including social media platforms, messaging apps, and emails. Unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying often takes place in a more prevalent environment where anonymity, time, and space create additional challenges for victims. In university settings, where students rely heavily on digital platforms for their academic and social interactions there is a high potential for cyberbullying. This issue has become a major concern due to its profound effects on the academic, social, and emotional development of students.

This study explores the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying on undergraduate students in three selected public universities in Sri Lanka. Specially, it investigates the extent to which cyberbullying affects students' academic achievements, emotional wellbeing, and social interactions. This study aims to shed light on the pressing need for universities to address cyberbullying and provide recommendations to improve institutional policies and support systems for the betterment of student's population. The primary objective of the study was to propose effective strategies for universities and government policy makers to combat cyberbullying and support affected students in an efficient way.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used a cross sectional mixed-method approach, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to explore the impact of cyberbullying on the academic, emotional and social developments of undergraduate students. This research was focused on undergraduate students from three selected public universities located in Western Province of Sri Lanka, representing diverse academic disciplines and years of study. A sample of 100 students was selected using random sampling technique to ensure representation from different faculties and departments of Government Universities Sector. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the participants including sections on demographics, the prevalence and types of cyberbullying, and questions related to academic performance, emotional well-being, and social interactions to. measure the degree of impact. Quantitative data were analyzed by using MS Excel software to explore relationships between cyberbullying, academic performance, and emotional outcomes and qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring themes and patterns in the experiences shared by the participants.

3. Results and Discussion

Prevalence of Cyberbullying:
The study findings revealed cyber bullying is increasing day by day around the society. According to findings 47% of the participants reported being victims of cyberbullying at least once during their time at university. The most common forms of cyberbullying included offensive comments, spreading false information, and exclusion from online social groups.

Effective strategies should implement to decrease those negative results against the student's community.
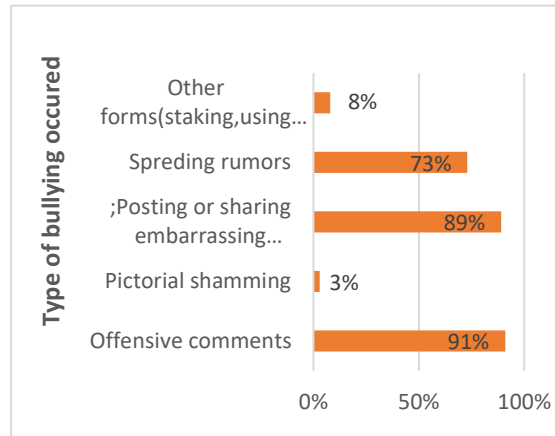

Figure 01: Distribution of the forms of Cyberbullying.

Academic Impact:
The study identified victims of cyberbullying reported significant declines in their academic performance. Approximately 45% of affected students stated that they had difficulty concentrating on their studies, leading to missed deadlines, decreased class attendance, and lower overall grades. Regression analysis showed a statistically significant negative correlation between cyberbullying and academic achievement

Emotional and Psychological Impact:
The study findings indicated that emotional toll of cyberbullying was profound. 92% of the victims reported feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression, with some indicating thoughts of self-harm. Cyberbullying was found to be a major contributor to deteriorating mental health, particularly among female students. Many victims also exhibited signs of low self-esteem and social withdrawal due to harassments they faced. Universities should provide accessible mental health services specially geared toward helping students deal with cyberbullying.
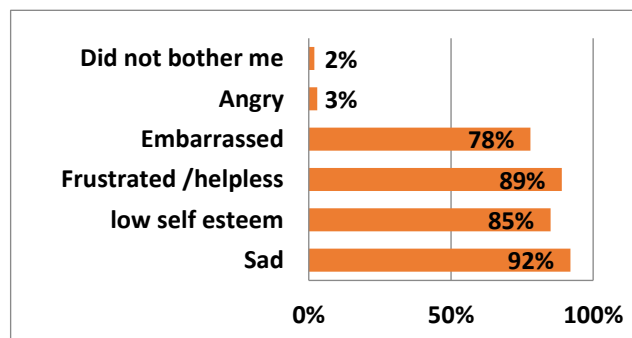

Figure 2: Distribution of how do they feel or felt about being cyberbullied

Social Relationships:
The study highlighted that cyberbullying is negatively impacted students' social lives. 89% of the victims indicated that they had distanced themselves from peer groups, leading to isolation. Fear of further bullying online caused many students to avoid social media platforms or limit interactions, which in turn affected their ability to form and maintain relationships. According to findings cyberbullying hinders students from being active in the society. This avoidance can lead to further isolation and mistrust, creating barriers to forming new relationships. Regular social activities and peer bonding programs can help students connect, building trust and resilience against isolation.
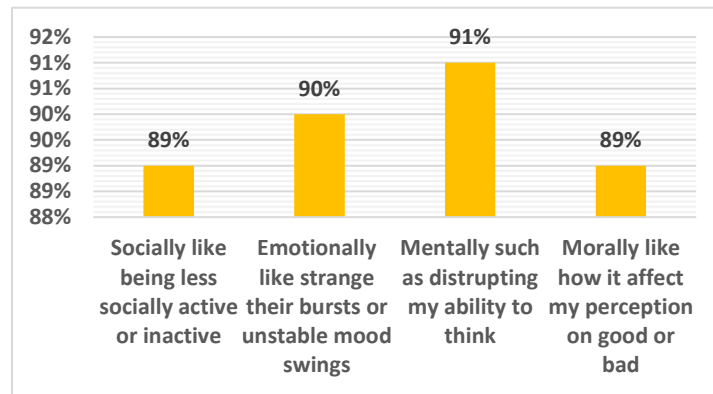
Figure 3: Distribution of How does cyberbullying affect them

The results of this study highlight the pervasive nature of cyberbullying and its severe impact on multiple aspects of students' lives. The negative correlation between cyberbullying and academic performance underscores the urgent need for academic institutions and government social and legal aids to address this issue. Emotional and psychological distress, coupled with social isolation, exacerbate the academic challenges faced by victims, often leading to a cycle of declining performance and further mental health struggles. Formal support structures, such as mentorship programs and counseling services provide victims with safe spaces to express their emotions and receive guidance on coping mechanisms. Awareness programs can positively impact student's social relationships

The findings are consistent with existing literature that links cyberbullying to poor mental health outcomes, including stress, depression, and anxiety. However, this study also highlights specific cultural and contextual factors unique to Sri Lanka, such as the role of familial expectations and social stigma, which may amplify the negative effects of cyberbullying on students. In collectivist societies students may rely on strong social support networks like family, friends or community groups, which can provide emotional and practical assistance when facing cyberbullying.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion this study shed light on the complex dynamics of cyberbullying among university students particularly in the Sri Lankan context. This study uncovered significant impacts of Academic, Emotional, Psychological and social influences of cyberbullying against university students. Nevertheless the study's findings underscore the importance of heightened awareness and proactive measures to address cyberbullying within university settings The study suggests for collaboration among students, government bodies and other stakeholders to implement policies and interventions to promote online safety and combat cyberbullying. Addressing the root causes of online harassment and creating a safer digital environment will not only enhance students' academic performance but also foster a healthier, more inclusive university culture.

5. Key words
Cyber bulling, Development, Government Universities, Undergraduates

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