

# Cyberbullying Among Malaysian Children Based on Research Evidence

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## INTRODUCTION

The Internet, a technology that cuts across geographical borders and overcomes the challenges of time is considered the most influential technological development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Dholakia & Kshetri 2004). It has been described as the modern Pandora's Box that has opened a new cyberspace of threats to unwary users (Ktoridou, Eteokleous & Zachariadou 2012). Given the broad use and the rapid sophistication of the cyber technology over the years, the Internet is gradually replacing conventional (traditional) media of communication and becoming not only a new means communication but also a new means of interaction and socialization for millions of users nowadays (Ktoridou et al. 2012).

Rapid innovative advancements in the cyber technology and cyber-related technologies have exceptionally augmented the capacity and categories of users over the decades. According to Dholakia and Kshetri (2004), the Internet took only three years to reach 50 million users around the world compared to the 13 years taken by the radio and 38 years by the television. Approximately 2.9 billion people all over the world have access to the Internet, representing around 41% of the world population, and this number continues to increase (Kenda 2014).

The cyberspace is rapidly becoming a medium for people to meet their everyday needs like searching for information, communicating and entertainment (University of Southern California, [USC] Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future [ASCDF], 2008). The cyberspace has certainly provided enormous benefits and advantages to the people (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin 2005). A meta-analysis study by Guan and Subrahmanyam (2009) has found that the cyber technology is a useful tool for promoting youth cognitive, social and physical development. In addition, scholars have emphasised the great utility of the Internet in successfully raising awareness regarding health issues, enhancing social relationships, maintaining community links among the young people and numerous other benefits (Barak & Sadovsky 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Flicker, Maley, Ridgley, Biscope, Lambardo & Skinner 2008).

Despite the positive effects of the cyberspace on users, the technology exerts some negative influences as well (e.g., cyberbullying), especially on children and the youth (Livingstone, 2012). Nowadays, Malaysian children and adolescents are increasingly using cyber technology at younger ages, with diverse devices and technologies (Balakrishnan 2015). In recent years however, there has been growing concern by the public, schools and parents about children and youth involvement

in online risk behaviors such as cyberbullying and harassment (Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak 2000; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2006). Many Malaysian youth and children have been exposed on daily basis to numerous Internet risks and harms (Balakrishnan 2015).

Given the ease of access and use of Internet technologies, even children learn how to use it; some children even go to the extent of protecting their online privacy from the prowling eyes of their parents (Yusuf, Osman, Hassan & Teimoury 2014). With just a click on the keyboard/keypad, children can access almost anything, including any kind of video, article and image they desire, including what they might stumble across accidentally (Balakrishnan 2015; Ktoridou et al. 2012), which often leads to incidences of cyberbullying, where children are being bullied by others while online (Yusuf et al. 2014).

This suggests that cyberbullying has been posing growing concern, especially for the online safety of the youth and children. Furthermore, there have been significant and rapid changes in children and youth's online activities in the last one decade in the country (Balakrishnan 2015; Yusuf et al. 2014). Evidently, there has been remarkable increase in the use of smartphones by the youngsters coupled with their migration from social activity to social networking sites across societies in the world (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2012) and in Malaysia (Abu Bakar 2013; Balakrishnan 2015).

Abu Bakar (2013) has empirically supported the issue that cyberbullying is a silent epidemic in the Malaysian society. The scholar indicated that online harassment and sexually based cyberbullying are the most common forms of cyberbullying in the country. Over the recent years, many incidents of cyberbullying had occurred on the Internet, which led to cases such as homicide, sexual assault, humiliation and assault. Cyberbullying incidents are increasing every in the country and becoming a potent threat to children, parents

and other stakeholders (Neging, Musa, R. & Abdul Wahab 2013).

Norton Family Report (NOFR) (2010) indicates that the rising popularity of the new media and the increasing amount of time children spend online pose great challenges to parents and or guardians who want to protect their children from the threats and harms of the cyberspace. Hence, this study was prompted by the urge to understand the prevalence of cyberbullying in Malaysia by determining the level of the phenomenon among children. One major area that this chapter has contributed to is the development of a scale suitable for measuring cyberbullying in Malaysian society. Given that previous research focuses on qualitative approach such as face-to-face and telephone interviews, there has been a dearth of quantitative scale to measure cyberbullying, particularly on sexually based cyberbullying and online harassment dimensions. Therefore, this study adopted a quantitative approach.

## BACKGROUND

### Cyberbullying in Malaysia

According to an Interpol statistics, online harassment is growing rampantly all around the world, and Malaysia is no exception. It has been reported that one in every five children online becomes the target of cyber predators and 30% of female children have been sexually harassed in a chat room (Azizan 2012).

The cyber security unit of Malaysia have conducted a survey on the effect of cyber threats on children and adolescents and found that about 60% of the cases reported to them were about cyberbullying on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace (Nik Anis, Abdul Rahim, & Lim 2012). Despite the limited number of literature on cyberbullying among Malaysian youngsters, a study conducted by Balakrishnan (2015) found

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