Chapter 8
Implication of Cyberbullying on Under-Represented Students in Post-Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is an emerging issue in the context of higher education as information and communication technologies increasingly become part of daily life at universities. This article offers a review of the major literature regarding cyberbullying, its victims and perpetrators, and its implications that impact disadvantaged students in higher education, specifically those who are in lower socio-economic situations. Post-secondary education has been an important pathway to guide students out of poverty by helping them lead successful lives. However, as in higher education, cyberbullying incidents have increased in educational situations, the bullied victims are more likely to report feelings of depression that cause an obstacle to their academic achievements in post-secondary education. The anonymous environments associated in cyberbullying can cause immorality of the cyberbullying perpetrators. To prevent cyberbullying on campus, this article provides cyberbullying rules and policies and suggests specialized treatment and interventions for cyber-bullies as a solution.

INTRODUCTION

The investigation of cyberbullying in post-secondary education has been substantive in recent years. Past studies focused primarily on bullying in the K–12 grades. It is assumed that maturity level has been reached by the time a student enters post-secondary education. However, cyberbullying is not limited to elementary, middle, or high school. It also occurs in post-secondary schooling. Research studies have continuously shown that cyberbullying is taking place at the post-secondary education level (Englander, 2007; Smith & Yoon, 2012). Statistics increased when students were asked about a time when they have witnessed cyber bullying occurring on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Recognizing and finding ways to eradicate cyberbullying is important as it can be an obstacle to students, especially underrepresented students, like women, minorities, and students in economically low status, who want to succeed in higher education. Post-secondary education has played an important role to move under-represented students out of poor socio-economic circumstances and help them to lead successful lives (NCVER, 2000). After training in post-secondary institutions students are hired more than those without college degrees. However, cyberbullying incidents in higher education have increased creating new obstacles for students with socio-economic and other disadvantages to complete their degrees in post-secondary education.

According to a survey conducted by researchers at the National Institutes of Health (Wang, Iannotti, & Nasel, 2009), the highest depression scores were reported in victims that had been bullied. Bully-victims are more likely to report feelings of depression than are other groups, which interfere with scholastic achievement, social skills, and feelings of well-being. This can, in turn, create an obstacle to students in post-secondary education, perhaps, especially minority and/or socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Common themes of cyberbullying incidents include targeting student's appearance, disability or health-status, grades, and economic situation (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). Cyberbullies are more likely to bully peers who appear vulnerable and poor, as well as having characteristics related to gender, race/ethnicity, color, religion, ancestry, sexual orientation or mental/physical/sensory ability levels. Therefore, bullying victims tend to be minority and/or socio-economically disadvantaged students who exhibit the following characteristics: anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem, poor social skills, and fewer or withdrawal from friends (Banks, 1997). Willard (2007) also concurred that cyberbullying victims may be selected based on the characteristics of different sexual orientation, weight, hyperactivity, slow maturation rate when compared to peers, and identification as a loner or nonconformist, as well as being economically poor.

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