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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the negative impacts of cyber-bullying on Year 2 and 3 students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad & Tobago. In the Caribbean, cyber-bullying was seen as insignificant and recently, it has been recognized in Trinidad & Tobago as a serious crime. Even though the bill for the cyberbullying and cyberstalking was introduced in 2017, there are those who still claim there are no impacts. Cyberbullying is most prevalent among young adults who spend majority of their time online. There are numerous negative impacts of cyberbullying which include physical and psychological. Victims of cyberbullying lack sleep, develop eating disorders, isolate themselves due to depression and anxiety and so much more. This research will focus on the term cyberbullying, it's definition and the negative impacts it has on year 2 and 3 students at the University of the West Indies, physically and mentally.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, social media, physical impacts, psychological impacts, isolation, depression, anxiety.

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INTRODUCTION

The term bullying is often associating with physical altercations like fist fights or verbal abuse such as name calling. However, there is another form of bullying that most adolescents and young adults face every day online. This is known as cyberbullying. According to UNICEF, Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted. Within Trinidad and Tobago, especially in the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, it can be argued that there are those who do not believe that cyberbullying has negative impacts.

Rationale:

Bullying is a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago and at the University of the West Indies. However, there are many students who do not believe that cyberbullying is as severe as bullying. They do not agree that there are physical impacts since the victim is not being physically attacked with fists and kicks. They also disagree that psychological impacts are rare because the victim is being attacked through a screen and can avoid it. Thus, the researcher aims to highlight the physical and psychological impacts of cyberbullying. This would then create awareness about cyberbullying and the harmful impacts which would influence students to prevent or stop cyberbullying.

Thesis Statement: Cyberbullying can negatively affect students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine physically and psychologically.

Parameters:

There were several parameters during the research. To begin with, this topic is very pertinent in this century where mental health is crucial. The investigation was limited to only year 2 and 3 students to get appropriate results, however, it would have been beneficial for first year university students or those who have not started university to share their attitudes, opinions and even their own personal experiences with cyberbullying. Since, the research was only limited to Trinidad and Tobago, it would have been beneficial to demonstrate the impacts of cyberbullying in other Caribbean islands. Additionally, only two factors of cyberbullying were examined when other impacts exist. Social and political impacts could have been examined to show the severity of cyberbullying but due to time constraint and the word limit, more research was not possible. Lastly, resources of cyberbullying in the Caribbean were limited since it is recently recognized as a serious issue. Therefore, the impact of cyberbullying in the Caribbean would not be completely demonstrated. Although, these parameters exist, they were implemented to ensure that the research was specific and manageable for the researcher so they would deliver a successful thesis without feeling overwhelmed. Whilst the research would outline and examine the negative impacts of cyberbullying, physically and mentally, the results will highlight the negative effects and the severity.

Research Questions:

1. How does cyberbullying affect students physically?
2. How does cyberbullying affect students psychologically?.

Objectives: The aim of the research is to highlight the negative impacts of cyberbullying as well raising awareness to alter the perception that it is insignificant and encourage the present and future generations to dissuade cyberbullying.

Chapter Outline:

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter one presents the literature review containing the definition and forms of cyberbullying as well as the physical and psychological impacts of cyberbullying. Chapter two contains the findings while chapter three is the discussion based on the findings derived from the questionnaire.

Methodology:

The research conducted was quantitative. The sources utilized were primarily secondary sources such as journals, articles, videos and text books. The data collection method was in the form of questionnaire which was distributed to Year 2 and 3 students at the University of the West Indies. A questionnaire was selected since it was a quick and sufficient way of collecting data for both the researcher and respondents. The respondents were all from year 2 and 3. Even though a mass email was sent, only 35 persons volunteered to participate. These responses were anonymous so the identity of the person would be protected. The questionnaire was also crucial when researching the physical and psychological impacts of cyberbullying. It also highlighted the seriousness of cyberbullying. After all data was conducted, the findings were presented using graphs such as pie charts and bar graphs. Finally, the results were also interpreted by the researcher using previous studies conducted about cyberbullying.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the years, bullying has evolved. Bullying is the repeated use of aggressive behaviours toward someone, where there is an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. The aggressor therefore intends to cause harm or distress to others (Olweus). Before the invention of technology and the use of social media, traditional bullying involved physical abuse such as kicking, verbal abuse like calling someone nasty names and relationship-focused aggression (Whitney & Smith). Today, there is a new form of bullying known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can be defined as “being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the internet or other digital technologies” (Willard). In the Caribbean, cyberbullying is relatively a new phenomenon existing due to the facts that adolescents spend majority of their time online. However, Jamaica is the top Caribbean island where cyberbullying is prevalent with 43% of their adolescents encountering cyberbullying (UNICEF, 2018) Cyberbullying can happen to anyone regardless of their age, gender, physical traits, culture, race and religion. It also takes several forms ranging from cyberstalking to harassment and to sharing harmful, false information about someone else.

Cyberbullying can occur on social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok. Text messaging or any text messaging apps on phones and tablets encourage cyber-bullies to continue their attacks on their victims. Cyberbullying can also occur via direct messaging on the Internet, online forums, chat rooms, gaming communities and even emails. Bullying became easier due to the invention of the Internet and social media. Cyber-bullies as well, would not be held accountable due to anonymity and often occurs out of school so they do not face any punishments (Belsey, 2004).

According to Willard (2006), there are also different forms of cyberbullying which include harassment, flaming, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, trickery and outing, exclusion, impersonation and sexting. Harassment involves sending messages to someone repeatedly through text messaging or direct messaging. Direct Messaging is a term more popularly known as a “DM” by teenagers or adolescents today and is used to describe a message via Instagram or Facebook. This form of cyberbullying creates annoyance and irritation for victims since they’re tired of explaining to their bullies to stop messaging them constantly. Flaming on the other hand, involves sending rude, vulgar messages to someone online in a group or privately. Cyberstalking involves harmful threats that are intimidating since the aggressor stalks their victim by creating various profiles to view their profiles if the aggressor is blocked. Denigration is sending or posting false, information about someone. Masquerade is impersonating someone and posting or sending harmful messages which can cause defamation of character to the actual person. Trickery and Outing is posting or sending sensitive, private information which can embarrass someone. Exclusion are actions that intentionally done by the aggressor to isolate their victim from groups. Impersonation is posing as the victim and sending negative messages or posting vulgar content to make it seem as if it was the victim. Lastly, sexting involves the distribution of nude, indecent photos online or to others without the individual’s consent.

Even though, these forms exist and are happening every day, there are those who fail to realize that cyberbullying is a serious issue and has negative impacts. There are several physical impacts of cyberbullying. Firstly, there is gastrointestinal issues. Due to the stress of bullying, it can worsen and create stomach issues such as upset stomach, abdominal pain, and stomach ulcers. The victim may also suffer from with nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. They can also develop an eating disorder. The cyber bully is taking away their victims control and power over themselves

and their perspective of themselves. The victims may binge eat as a coping mechanism or they may skip meals (Gordon, 2022). Victims may develop bulimia. According to Mayo Clinic, bulimia is an eating disorder where a person binge eats by consuming large amounts of food at one time and then discards it by making themselves vomit or by using laxatives (Mayo Clinic, 2018). On the other hand, victims may develop anorexia which is an eating disorder characterized by an abnormally low body weight, intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of one's body (Mayo Clinic, 2018). Thus, the victims also develop body dysmorphia if the cyber-bully is attacking the victim's body. Body dysmorphia is a mental illness characterized by constant worrying over a perceived or slight defect in appearance (Better health). They may also suffer from sleep disturbances or insomnia. They could have nightmares about the situation and their sleeping schedule would be affected causing them to be tired and unproductive the next day (Gordon, 2022).

Additionally, there are several psychological effects. In fact, the psychological effects are more severe than the physical. Cyberbullying in the Caribbean, affects psychological state and state of being. With regards to mental health, Beale and Hall (2007) wrote that there are six ways of cyberbullying. They include: e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms/bash boards, small text messaging, Web sites, and voting booths. "Bash Boards" in particular, is a code name for an online bulletin board where students can write whatever they want anonymously. Some students choose to write taunting statements rather than positive ones. Other websites as well uses voting polls. These sites allow the users to vote anonymously online for the "ugliest," "fattest," "dumbest," "biggest slut," and so on, boy or girl in their school (Beale & Hall, 2007). When the victims encounter these sites and see nasty posts about themselves, their emotional state triggers their psychological state. Many victims feel humiliated, sad, angry, alone, scared and embarrassed. (Bergman, 2023).

For instance, in a study conducted in Haiti about cyberbullying, 44.4% of the respondents felt annoyance, 26.8% felt embarrassed, 40.8% had feelings of anger and 16.9% had a feeling of shame (Sindy, 2021). Due to these negative emotions, victims would find different ways of coping. One method is isolating themselves. Cyberbullying can create a feeling of loneliness. Loneliness is defined as an “unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity” (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). They ostracize themselves because they feel all alone, humiliated and their sense of belonging has been taken away (Gordon, 2022). Additionally, there are those who suffer from low esteem or their self-esteem would decrease after experiencing cyberbullying. The bullies would often target a particular physical feature or some aspect of the victim’s life that would make the victim insecure. Then, they begin to question their value and worth. Recently, research has indicated that victims have lower self-esteem (Cenat et al., 2014) while perpetrators have high self-esteem (Brewer, 2015). This is because many researchers have found that young people have the desire to fit in and be accepted into peer groups (Gordon, 2022). The bullies would be seen as mean but popular or have a higher social media ranking like an influencer and the victim would be seen as ‘pathetic’ or someone with a lower social ranking.

Due to the fact that cyberbullying can create low self-esteem and diminishes one’s confidence, it can cause severe anxiety and depression. The added stress from being bullied, can increase one’s sadness and force them to also isolate themselves from the world. They would be too anxious to open social media sites out of fear because they would constantly see negative posts about themselves (Gordon, 2022). However, we live in a society where technology is rapidly taking over control of our world and our lives. According to Willard, there are a lot of students who disclose their personal information online and are becoming addicted to the Internet (Willard,

2006). They live, breathe and thrive on the Internet, which is why it may be difficult for someone to simply turn off their phones or delete their accounts when being cyberbullied. Today, everything is the Internet and nothing gets permanently deleted. Some students do not confide in their teachers, parents or friends because they do not understand the desire to be seen and recognized online. Others use social media as a safe space for them to vent and voice their concerns to strangers. When they experience cyberbullying, their safe space is taken away from them and they no longer have no one to confide in or express themselves. A lot of victims spend their time online and are dependent on the Internet for everything. This dependence can cause addiction and when experiencing cyberbullying, the prevalence of suicide and self-harm communities increase (Willard, 2006) because they are looking for new coping mechanisms.

In fact, suicide and thoughts of self-harm is highly prevalent amongst victims. Depression can lead victims to suicidal thoughts and tendencies. They want to relieve the pain by cutting themselves with a razor or burning themselves (Gordon, 2022). In other cases, the victims are constantly being pestered by the perpetrator. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, "Students have received reports of threats on-line and via text messages from other students. "We also have students who know how to break into another student's account. In other instances they target other students by circulating sexually suggestive photos" (Kowlessar, 2018). When this happens, victims are often "slut shamed" and are ridiculed online constantly. The constant vulgar name calling would lead to the victim having depression. This would then create suicidal thoughts and even lead the victim to killing themselves. "Suicide can sometimes be contagious. In these cases, one teen's death may touch off copycat behaviour." Additionally, depression is very hard to spot especially when victims are acting like they are okay. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, a 15 year old boy committed suicide by hanging himself on a mango tree. Relatives, neighbors and teachers all

claim that this was unexpected, out of his character and he displayed no signs of depression (Mohammed, 2020). However, it is claimed that cyberbullying is on the rise in Trinidad and Tobago (Kowlessar, 2018). By being a victim of cyberbullying, suicide is seen by most persons as a means of escaping the bullying and feelings of shame and embarrassment.

It is vital to note that internationally, cyberbullying is more recognized than in the Caribbean. Nixon (2014), has stated that “cyberbullying is an emerging international public health concern, related to serious mental health concerns, with significant impacts on adolescents.” Sheri Gordon as well, has recognized that cyberbullying is growing problem that affects people around the world. In fact, cyberbullying has surpassed traditional bullying internationally. In fact, 42% of teenagers have been victims of name calling and one third of teenagers have stated that someone has spread gossip and rumors about them online (Gordon, 2020). As recognized by Willard (2006), sexting is a form of cyberbullying and it is reported that 7% of teenagers have reported that persons have shared explicit content with them (Gordon, 2020).

Despite the fact that cyberbullying can occur to anyone, there are some leading factors that influence cyberbullying. Firstly, even though males and females can be cyberbullied equally, there are still differences in the types of bullying they endure. For instance, 60% of girls have claimed that they experienced harassment such as badgering in terms of where they are and who they are with. They also experienced name-calling, threats and had rumors about themselves as well as obscene pictures sent to them while 59% of males have experience the same type of cyberbullying. 39% of girls have claimed that someone has spread rumors about them online while 26% have had the same experience. Girls are also more likely to be sent unwanted solicited pictures or “nudes” rather than males (Gordon, 2020).

However, according to Hillary Noll (2016), the recent studies about gender differences among cyberbullies and adolescents who have been cyberbullied are inconsistent. In the literature review by Noll (2016), there were several cases studied that depicted the inconsistency between cyberbullying and gender. For instance, research by Schenk (2011), indicated that there was no gender difference found among the 8.6% of participants who reported being a victim of cyberbullying. Another supporting research done by Hinduja and Patchin (2008), concluded that there were no gender differences between adolescents and cyberbullying. On the other hand, there are other research that support Gordon, (2020). For example, research by Li (2007), that out of 133 students that were victims of cyberbullying, 21.9% of them were males and 13.4% were female. Finally, Walrave & Heriman (2011), found that females were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than males (Noll, 2016).

Another factor one must consider as to why they are victims of cyberbullying, is the fact that they are online constantly. Cyberbullying is linked to the duration a person spends online. 45% of teenagers have stated that they are constantly online. They are also more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than the average person who spends little or no time on the Internet. In fact, 70% of teens who have reported being online constantly have been cyberbullied, while 53% of teens who do not use the Internet, have no experienced cyberbullying (Gordon, 2020).

Whilst cyberbullying is recognized as a serious issue in other countries, there is a lack of sources regionally based on cyberbullying, especially in Trinidad and Tobago where it is “considered a relatively new phenomenon though youths have been bullying their peers for generations through varying forms” (Cyberbullying and youth, 2015). This is due to several reasons. Persons have failed to realize that the Internet is a scary place. The dark web does exist and there are persons who participate in frightening activities online. Some persons can even take

it too far with cyberbullying. However, in their minds there is no limit because of anonymity. This is a factor that was studied by Heirman & Walrave (2008). Cyberbullies are often anonymous and are “free” to say and do whatever they please because they are not bullying the victim in person and would not suffer the consequences. Instead, the bullies have access to privacy through communication online and 24/7 attainability. “24/7 attainability refers to the fact that the bullying follows the victims home and is present online and on the victim's phones, all hours of the day” (Heirman & Walrave, 2008). There are two things one must acknowledge when it comes to the Internet. Firstly, the Internet does not sleep. There will always be someone awake, watching and waiting. One cannot simply unplug the Internet and move on with their day. Therefore, the victim can be bullied at any time and place if they have an electronic device such as a phone or laptop. Often, there are times where the bully posts something and the victim may not know until days later. Secondly, this post unseen by the victim may have several views since it would be uploaded to social media sites such as Facebook or YouTube. Other people would comment and continue to share this information so it would go viral. By the time the victim has seen it, the damage to their reputation is very drastic. It would be difficult to erase this information because the Internet stores data and nothing is permanently removed from the Internet. There is also a high possibility that someone has already downloaded it to continue sharing it just in case the original post has been deleted (Heirman & Walrave, 2008).

Another reason cyberbullying is not recognized by the Caribbean is due to the fact that many persons agree that cyberbullying is not as serious as traditional bullying. A CDC report in 2018 indicated that 19% of adolescents reported being bullied at school while 14% were bullied online (Strasburger, 2021). There are little incidents of cyberbullying but traditional bullying is popular in the Caribbean, especially in schools. Many persons may believe that it is more severe

than cyberbullying by its definition. Bullying is an act of aggression that results in an exchange of hurtful words, physical strength and psychological acts of demonstrating temper and violence. Physical bullying is alarming considering it may also involve carrying weapons such as knives and guns (Bratt, 2016). Cyberbullying does not involve weapons which is why one would perceive cyberbullying as “harmless”. However, they fail to acknowledge that bullying has the same impacts as cyberbullying mentioned earlier on. Bullying is a serious threat to public health, that causes hopelessness, increases nervousness and serious mental problems. It can lead to alcohol and drug use which leads to exploitation. It can also affect one’s thought process and affect one’s academia and the victims are often linked to suicide and suicidal tendencies (Strickland, 2016).

Regardless, the Caribbean is still attempting to raise awareness on cyberbullying and its severity by amending laws. Jamaica actually improved and introduced its cybercrime act in 2015 which includes fraud or forgery, the use of computers for malicious purposes and communications and the unauthorized disclosure of an investigation (Department of Legal Cooperation – OAS). The cyber-crime bill in Trinidad & Tobago was also in 2015 and was improved in 2017 and was aimed at increasing penalties for offences like revenge porn, cyberbullying and cyberstalking. Cyberstalking as mentioned by Willard (2006), is a form of harassment that is linked with cyberbullying. However, despite these laws in Trinidad & Tobago, there are still many victims who do not feel protected and are mentally exhausted. There were many victims who claim that the T&T police service were not doing a good job protecting their citizens. One victim proclaimed, "So, if they aren't taking that seriously, are they going to take a bunch of messages with threats seriously?" Another stated her frustrations by saying, "They are not seeing that as anything. They are not seeing the psychological warfare that a person goes through when they are being harassed and when they are being stalked." Lastly, a victim who has been stalked for more than 5 years

exclaimed, "It feels like, why bother? We are just so ignored and I don't think they realize how far this goes—essentially, it's just so psychological beyond it being physical, obviously, being a real threat to physical safety and potentially turning into real violence" (Seemungal, 2021).

However, due the Covid-19 pandemic, cyberbullying had increased. During lockdown in March to April 2020, there was a 70% increase with cyberbullying across millions of websites, social networks, teen chatting forums and gaming sites globally. There was also a 40% increase of toxicity on gaming websites a 200% of traffic for hate websites (Tiel, 2020). This drastic increase of cyberbullying was seen in the Caribbean as well. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, in March 2020, a woman whose identity remained anonymous for her protection but was referred to as "Naomi" was being harassed through Facebook and WhatsApp. Despite, Naomi's anonymous report, the stalker found out and began threatening Naomi. At first, it started of with anonymous calls, emails and social media friend requests from suspicious profiles. However, after a while, it became serious when the person sent Naomi pictures of her own house and accurately described the clothes Naomi was wearing that day. Naomi also noted that she was extremely frustrated, worried and fearful for her life. Her mental health was affected and she was in constant paranoia as she stated, "Even when I'm in my home, I don't feel safe because I constantly wonder if somebody is watching. I wonder if I go outside to take out the trash, what's going to happen?—Is there somebody who might be in a vehicle that I may not have noticed?" (Seemungal, 2021).

CHAPTER TWO: THE FINDINGS:

A questionnaire with a total of 16 questions which included open and closed questions was distributed through google forms. Only 35 participants volunteered to participate. Twenty-two (22) persons were female, one (1) preferred not to say and twelve (12) were male. The students were in their second and third year of university. Twenty- seven (27) persons selected that they were in year three while eight (8) persons selected year two. The pie chart below shows the number of year 2 and 3 university students who have been cyberbullied at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. As recorded below, 42.% selected yes while 57.1% stated no.

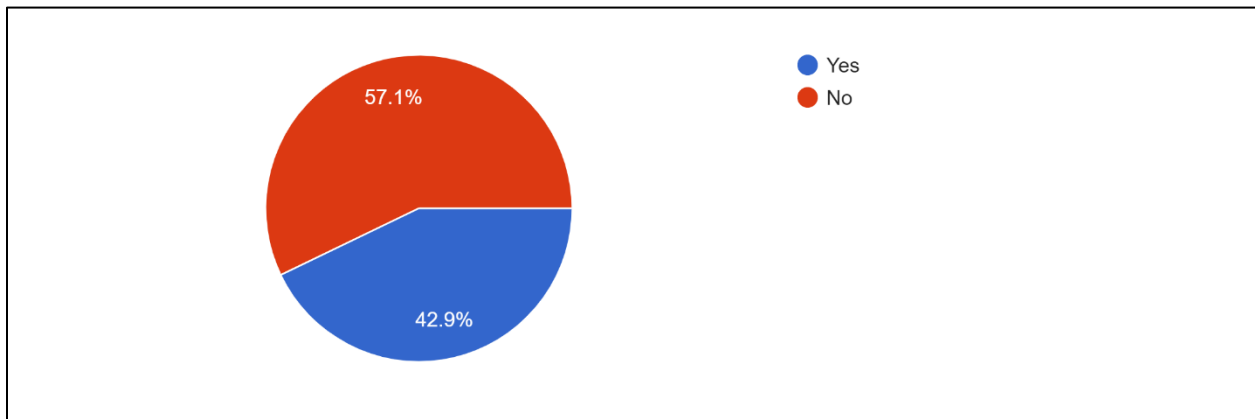


Figure 1: Pie Chart showing the amount of university students in Year 2 & 3 who have been cyberbullied.

These victims all experienced different forms of cyberbullying as mentioned by Willard (2006). The diagram below shows the amount of students and ways in which students have been victims of cyberbullying. After, the respondents were given the chance to explain how they felt and reacted to being cyberbullied. Some claimed that they cried and ignored the cyberbullying while other felt sad, ashamed, depressed , embarrassed, alone and scared.

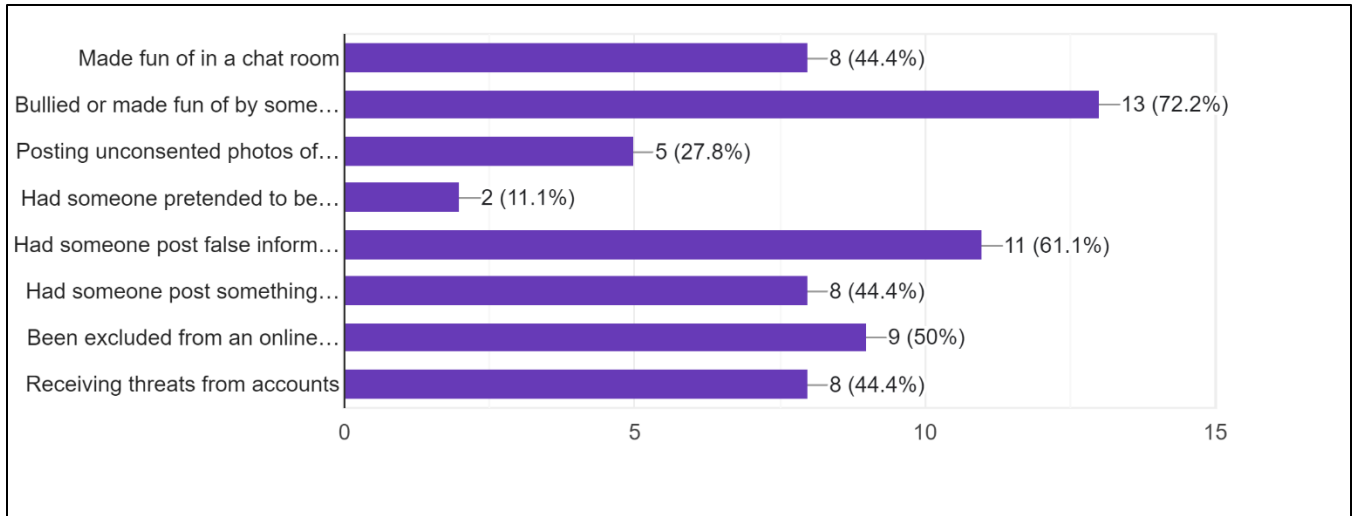


Figure 2 showing the ways in which students experienced cyberbullying

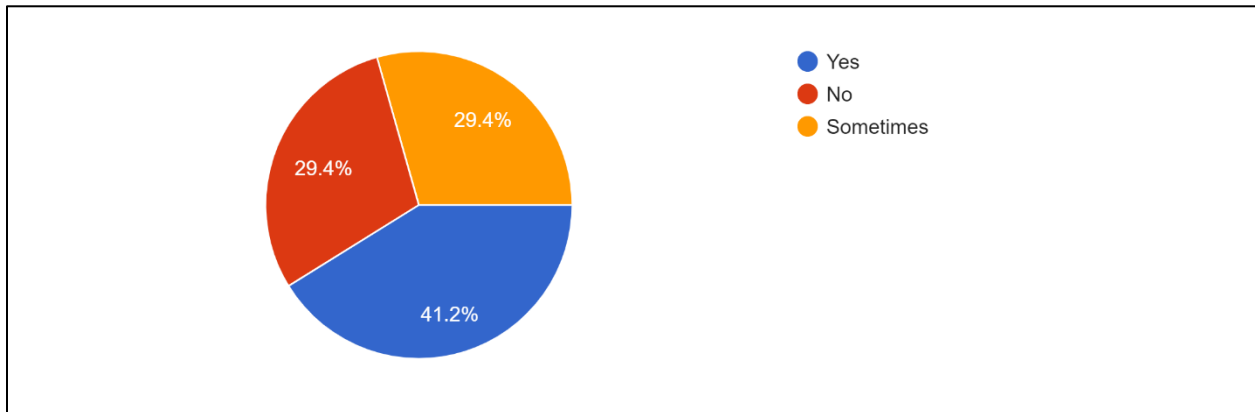


Figure 3 showing the amount of students who found it difficult to concentrate in class due to cyberbullying

Not only were the students affected emotionally, but it also hindered their concentration in classes. The diagram above shows that 41.2% agreed that as victims of cyberbullying, it was difficult to concentrate in class. Due to their emotions and the cyberbullying, their minds are too engrossed on the pain and their negative emotions which makes it difficult to focus and retain information. They tend to zone out and be in their own world and the class is used as background noise for their

thoughts. However, these emotions and cyberbullying, not only affects their concentration but their grades a well. The figure below shows how many students' grades were affected negatively due to cyberbullying. 66.7% of the participants said that cyberbullying affected their grades negatively. This means that cyberbullying either lead to their grades lowering or they are failing.

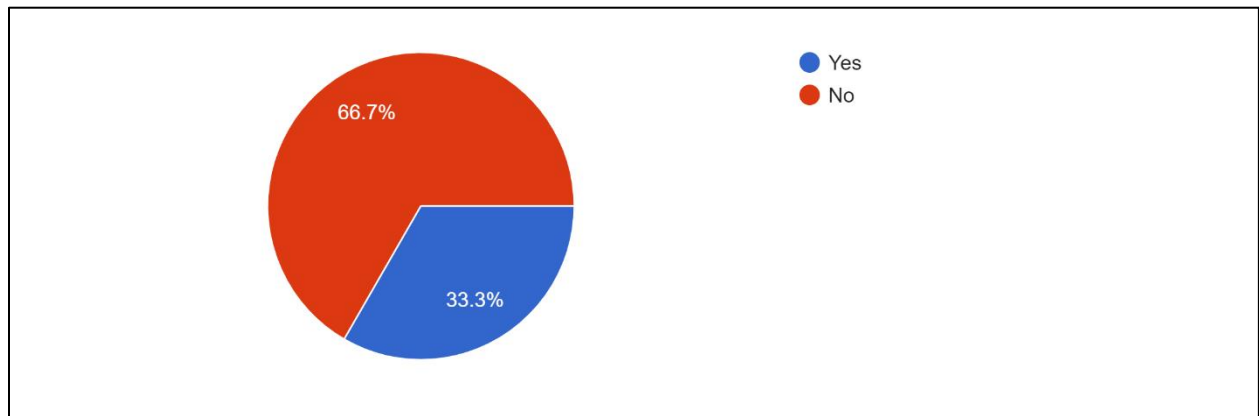


Figure 4 showing the amount of students whose grades were affected negatively due to cyberbullying

There were also other effects psychologically and physically that affected those who experienced cyberbullying. The figure below demonstrated the effects that the victims endured while dealing with cyberbullying. These included suicidal thoughts and tendencies, drugs and substance abuse, stress, eating disorders, anxiety, depression and many more. The respondents were also given the option to state any other effects and only one responded that they chose to handle their anxiety alone.

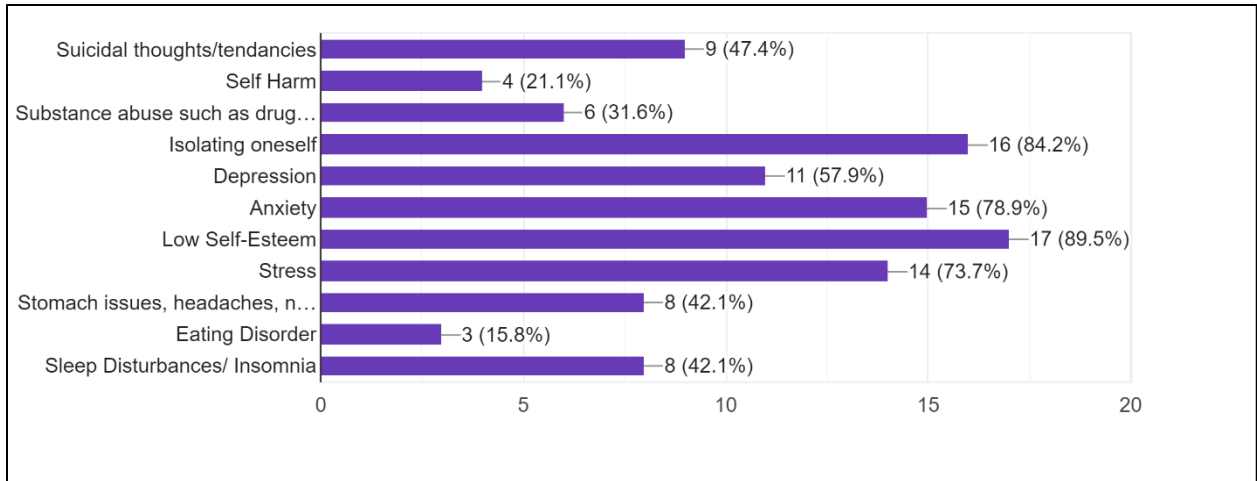


Figure 5 showing the effects students endured whilst battling cyberbullying

CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to highlight the negative impacts of cyberbullying, spread awareness and alter the perception that cyberbullying is not a serious issue at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. The findings of the research demonstrated that cyberbullying has serious physical and psychological effects and that cyberbullying should be taken seriously at the university.

Firstly, a total of 35 participants with ages ranging from 19-21, participated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also completed anonymously. Based on the results, 15 persons claimed that they were victims of cyberbullying. In the past three years, 11 persons were cyberbullied one to three times, 4 persons were cyberbullied three to five times, 1 person was cyberbullied six to ten times and 2 persons were victims of cyberbullying for 10 times and more. The participants as well, selected that they believed that they and other persons, experience the most amount of cyberbullying on social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook. This demonstrated the alterations and evolution of technology as well the differences between generations since past studies indicated that the most common sites for cyberbullying are Facebook, followed by Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat (Bergman, 2023). This drastic change can be due to the fact that majority of young adolescents and adults prefer to use new apps such as Instagram and TikTok rather than Facebook. Today, Instagram has 900 million active users and is currently the fastest growing social media instead of Facebook (Kent, 2017). For most of the upcoming generations, Facebook is seen as outdated. There was a lack of interesting content to capture the attention of users and numerous annoying, pointless advertisements. Others found it useless and lost the appeal while others claimed that the emergence of other social media sites peaked their interest. It is also said that when friends and family members join these new sites,

others are most likely to join so they can communicate and share their thoughts, ideas and opinions ((Hong & Oh, 2020).

Additionally, as stated by Willard, (2006) there are various forms of cyberbullying. These forms are harassment, flaming, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, trickery and outing, exclusion, impersonation and sexting. The participants experienced more than one form of cyberbullying as mentioned by Willard. Eight participants selected that they were made fun of in a chat room, 13 had rumors about themselves, 5 selected that their personal photos were exposed without their consent, 2 had their identities stolen and 11 persons had false information posted about themselves. Furthermore, 9 persons claimed that they had been excluded from online groups while 8 participants each had photos of themselves posted that they did not want others to see and received threats from various accounts.

Due to being cyberbullied in different ways, the participants were asked how they reacted and coped with cyberbullying. Research by Hana Machackova et al. (2013), has shown that there four ways of dealing or not dealing with cyberbullying. One way of coping is by sharing information with your friends, relatives and having their support, love and advice on how to deal with cyberbullying. Next, is using psychological means to cope such as denial: thinking it did not happen or believing that this happens on the Internet and it is “normal,” or by simply ignoring it and believing it would not hurt. Another way is retaliating by getting revenge such as blackmailing the cyberbully or bullying the bully the same way the victim has experienced. Finally, there is circumvention where the victim removes the perpetrator from their contacts, accounts or deletes their own social media account to protect themselves. They can also block the cyberbully so they won't have access to the victim anymore (Chi et al. 2020).

Based on the research by Hana Machackova et al. (2013) and the research conducted, there are few things that coincide and others that differ. Six participants used psychological ways of coping by ignoring and not responding to the cyberbullying. There were two participants who viewed this method of coping with separate perceptions. One participant claimed that if they knew who the bully was they would confront them and if not, they would ignore the bully and deny the rumors while another participant stated that by ignoring the bully, they reclaim their power and control. By ignoring the perpetrator, you do not let them control your emotions and thoughts. The only person who can make you feel inferior, is yourself. Thus, by ignoring the bully, you are in control of emotions and would not let a person who does not know you affect you physically and mentally. On the other hand, one participant claimed that they ignored it and kept their feelings to themselves. This shows that they were not able to confide in any one and felt like they was not in control anymore. This is in contrast to another participant who reacted by confiding in their friends and family by explaining the situation in hopes of finding solutions. Furthermore, five respondents used the circumvention method. They did this by removing the negative comments from their profiles to protect their mental health, blocking the perpetrator, deactivating their social media accounts or leaving online chatrooms and by making reports. However, one participant claimed that they tried investigating the cyberbully despite being anonymous, but after blocking the perpetrator the bullying stopped and they never confided in their relatives because they would be worried. Lastly, two respondents stated that they would retaliate and seek revenge by reciprocating their bully's behaviour.

When the respondents were asked on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest if they believe that cyberbullying is a serious issue at UWI, the results varied. Two respondents selected 1, eleven chose 2, sixteen chose 3, four chose 4 and two as well selected 5. It

appears that cyberbullying is not taken seriously at the university. However, based on the effects that victims have endured, it is vivid that cyberbullying should be taken seriously since it has severe physical and mental effects. As mentioned by Gordon, (2022) victims of cyberbullying can experience stomach issues, insomnia or sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, stress, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and many more. The results from the questionnaire confirms this. Nine participants selected that they experience suicidal thoughts and tendencies, four resorted to self-harm while six used alcohol and drugs. Sixteen respondents selected that they isolated themselves, eleven had depression, fifteen had anxiety and seventeen had low self-esteem. Finally, fourteen selected that they were stressed, eight experience headaches, nausea and stomach aches. Three developed eating disorders and eight experienced sleep disturbances and insomnia.

Their emotions as well were impacted due to the fact that they were victims of cyberbullying. The participants stated that they felt hurt, embarrassed, ashamed, sad, depressed, unworthy, confused and scared. One participant in particular, claimed that they were feeling hurt and ashamed because of the cyberbullying and it distracted them from their studies. “ In terms of academic performance, victims will mostly shoulder the impacts such as lower academic grades, reduction in concentration during class, and failure (Hidayah et al. 2022). This is also reflected in the results of the questionnaire. When respondents were asked if they did not attend or avoided school because of cyberbullying, 33.3% said yes and 33.3% also said sometimes. Additionally, 41.2% found it difficult to concentrate in class and 29.4% selected that sometimes it was difficult to concentrate in class. Lastly studies have shown that bullying averts students from achieving good grades and due to new technologies being created, cyberbullying is increasing and creating more stress for students. Therefore, the respondents were asked whether or not cyberbullying affected their grades negatively. 33.3% of the participants selected yes while 66.7% selected no.

However, there is another method of coping that was not mentioned by Hana Machackova et al. (2013). “Similar to face-to-face bullying, engaging in cyberbullying can result in psychosocial problems, which might promote the use of alcohol and drugs” (Arcadevani, F. B, 2011). Often, they tend to abuse these substances. Six (6) of the participants actually selected that they have turned to substance abuse and it was an effect due to being cyberbullied. Since cyberbullying generates stress, students would develop maladaptive behaviors, including substance use to alleviate their stress. Students would quicker turn to cigarettes, marijuana edibles, and prescription opioids (Yoon et. al. 2019). Other times, they would turn to drinking. For university students, universities are their prime years to party and have a good time. They binge drink, smoke and do drugs. They use alcohol, just like drugs to deal with the pressures of their lives. When experiencing cyberbullying, they use alcohol as a form of happiness. They no longer feel anxious, depressed or worried about their perpetrator. Even though, it may seem as a way of coping with their suffering, this can only worsen their health and lead to addictions.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that cyberbullying has harmful negative effects, especially for students at UWI. Regardless of the fact that cyberbullying can be executed in different ways, the consequences are all devastating. Victims who have been cyberbullied are being physically and psychologically affected. Their academic performance as well can be severely impacted. Moreover, they may develop substance abuse addictions as coping mechanisms. It has been reported that cyberbullying is a fairly new “concept” in Trinidad & Tobago but it is evident after this research, that more action must be taken to raise awareness about cyberbullying and preventing it from escalating due to the evolution of technology.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

An Investigation on the Negative Impacts of Cyber-Bullying on Year 2 & 3 students at UWI, St. Augustine:

My name is Reneé Ramkissoon. I am a year three (3) student of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad & Tobago. I am conducting research on the negative impacts of cyberbullying and this survey is intended for year 2 and 3 students at UWI, St. Augustine. Therefore, if you are eligible, your time, patience and participation is greatly appreciated. This survey will take approximately ten (10) minutes to complete and your responses will be anonymous. Thank you again for your contribution.

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

2. Kindly state your age: _____

3. Select the year you are currently in at UWI, St. Augustine

- Year 2
- Year 3

4. Have you ever experienced cyberbullying?

- Yes
- No

5. If you selected, how many times have you been cyberbullied in the past 3 years?

- 1-3 times

- 3-5 times
 - 6-10 times
 - 10 times and more
6. Do you believe that Cyberbullying is a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
7. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest). Do you think that students in UWI believe that cyberbullying is a serious issue?
8. Please rank where you believe cyberbullying most and least likely occurs. 1 being the lowest while 5 is the highest:
- Email
 - Facebook
 - Gaming communities
 - Instagram
 - Online Forums and chat rooms
 - Snapchat
 - Text messages
 - TikTok
 - Twitter
9. If you've selected yes to Cyberbullying, please select the form of your experience/s. You may select more than one.
- Made fun of in a chat room

- Bullied or made fun of by someone who spread rumors or gossip about you
- Posting unconsented photos of yourself
- Had someone pretended to be you
- Had someone post false information about yourself
- Had someone post something of you that you did not want others to see
- Been excluded from an online group
- Receiving threats from accounts

10. How did you react to cyberbullying?

11. How did you feel about being cyberbullied?

12. When you experienced cyberbullying did you not want to attend school/ make excuses to avoid going to school?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

13. Did you find it harder to concentrate in classes?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

14. Did cyberbullying affect your grades negatively?

- Yes
- No

15. When experiencing cyberbullying, kindly select the effects that you endured. You can select more than one:

- Suicidal thoughts/tendencies
- Self-harm
- Substance abuse such as drugs or alcohol
- Isolating yourself
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Stress
- Stomach issues, headaches, nausea
- Eating disorder
- Sleep disturbances/insomnia

16. If you experienced any other side effects of cyber bullying, please state them. Thank you!