

# Social Media and Violence: Research on Experiences of Cyberbullying among Youth in America

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## Abstract:

In contemporary society, nearly all people, from children to the elderly, own mobile phones. While the widespread use of social media greatly benefits people, it also has numerous negative effects. Teenagers often engage with social media; they can learn more and connect with others through these platforms. At the same time, many of them also experience bullying on social media platforms. This paper will explore the significance of social media in the daily lives of US teenagers, as well as the detrimental effects it can have on them, including mental health issues, social relationship problems, and poor academic performance. Next, the paper will discuss the factors such as the role of social media, the lack of organizations, and the behavior patterns of teenagers that contribute to these negative impacts. Moreover, in order to address and reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying, social media companies, government organizations, families, and schools must collaborate to develop and implement practical solutions. In-depth research on these topics provides insights, facilitates discussion, and proposes potential directions for more effective prevention and intervention approaches.

**Keywords:** Social media; Cyberbullying; Adolescents; Negative impacts.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, as the population of the internet and the rapidly developing technologies have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of teenagers, especially in America, teenagers' reliance on social media has increased significantly. According to the statistics from Smart Social (2022), 95% of teenagers

have smartphones, and more than 90% of teenagers are active on social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and so on. While these platforms offer a convenient means of communication and expression, they can also lead to a variety of cyberbullying problems. Different from traditional bullying, cyberbullying uses the anonymity and rapid transmissibility of the internet to express their abu-

sive expressions, which leads victims to suffer much more pain [1, 2]. Also, as Patchin indicates, the cyberbullying problem has become one of the most common mental health problems among American adolescents, which seriously affects their physical and mental health and social adaptation abilities [3].

Social media is rapidly gaining popularity among American teens, directly impacting their daily lives. According to the research report of Common Sense Media, teenagers in the US spend more than 7 hours on social media every day on average [4]. This phenomenon has made social platforms the main tool for young people to communicate with each other, share information, and express themselves. However, the widespread use of social media comes with its own set of risks, particularly the risk of cyberbullying.

The impact of cyberbullying on teens is uniquely challenging. Firstly, the cyberbullying issue is not only limited to a single event; its negative impact could rapidly extend through network communications, which leads the victims to suffer from bullying in the long term and make it hard to get rid of the psychological pressure [5]. Secondly, due to the fact that social media operates all day, victims may suffer from cyberbullying at anytime and anywhere, making their lives more difficult (Kowalski et al., 2014) [6]. Furthermore, teenagers are usually afraid of being shamed or revenged that they would not ask their parents and teachers for help; this further exacerbates the seriousness of the problem.

Additionally, as the use of social media expands, the forms and effects of cyberbullying become increasingly complex. A report from the Cyberbullying Research Center shows that cyberbullying involves not only mocking and insulting others but also the malicious dissemination of personal information, spreading rumors, and engaging in online harassment [7]. Moreover, because of the real-time and extensive coverage of social media, victims of cyberbullying usually feel helpless, which has negative impacts on their mental health [8].

This research will explore the issues that American adolescents suffer from cyberbullying in the environment of social media and analyze how the use of social media increases the risks of cyberbullying that teenagers suffer. Through related statistics and resources, the paper will discuss the importance of social media in the lives of teenagers and its negative effects. Additionally, the study explores how to lessen the negative impacts of cyberbullying through collaboration among social media platforms, schools, families, and governments.

The cyberbullying issue has been a global problem, especially seriously impacting US teenagers. Research shows that cyberbullying's victims not only take a psychological

hit but also may deeply have long-term negative impacts on social, academic, and physical health [9]. Therefore, it is of great significance to conduct in-depth research on this phenomenon. At first, this paper contributes to the analysis of cyberbullying. Secondly, by analyzing the factors of cyberbullying, this research helps educators, parents, teachers, and policymakers better understand how to prevent and respond to the problem effectively [10].

Moreover, researching cyberbullying is crucial to promoting social attention to youth mental health issues. Recent years have seen a number of suicide incidents among teenagers, which underscores the seriousness and urgency of this issue. Through this paper, related organizations and individuals can gain more information and opinions to better avoid cyberbullying among teenagers and promote their mental health and overall development.

## **2. Situation and Negative Impacts of Cyberbullying on American Teenagers**

### **2.1 Definition of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying means the intentional harm or the harassment of others through digital platforms (such as social media, instant messaging software, and online forums). Different from traditional face-to-face bullies, cyberbullying is characterized by rapid and persistent anonymous transmissions. As the research explores, cyberbullying not only includes the spread of malicious information but also involves privacy violations and mental health issues. Alao compared with victims from traditional bullies, the victims from cyberbullying usually perform a much more obvious anxiety, loneliness, or even depression problem.

### **2.2 Cyberbullying Phenomenon among American Adolescents**

According to the Vogels, E. A., about 46% of American teenagers have ever suffered from some kind of cyberbullying. Among these teenagers, 15% of them considered that they have been targeted for cyberbullying because of their appearance, while 10% of them felt they were harassed due to their races and cultural backgrounds. This shows that the cyberbullying problem is not only about personal conflict; it also involves adolescents' identities, appearances, and other dimensions [11].

### **2.3 Negative Impacts of Cyberbullying on American Teenagers**

Cyberbullying negatively impacts teenagers in multiple aspects, particularly their mental health, self-esteem, social relationships, and academic performance.

### 2.3.1 Mental Health Problems

Cyberbullying has the most significant impact on teenagers' mental health. Research indicates that teens who have experienced cyberbullying are more susceptible to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. These problems are often accompanied by ongoing emotional distress and stress. According to Fahy et al., the mental health problems of cyberbullying victims usually last for a long time and can even trigger self-harm [12]. Furthermore, as victims who feel huge psychological pressure due to their long-time being cyberbullied, especially because of the anonymity and continuous nature of cyberbullying, it is hard for victims to escape, which exacerbates their psychological distress. These psychological stresses are also closely linked to the suicide risk in adolescents. Research shows that cyberbullying victims have significantly higher rates of suicidal thoughts than other teens; this indicates that the long-term impacts of cyberbullying could lead to the extreme problem [13]. Therefore, the cyberbullying problem is not only a short-term emotional disturbance, but also its long-term psychological hurt can persist throughout adolescence, and even impact their mental health in adulthood.

### 2.3.2 Low Self-esteem

It was obvious that the cyberbullying deeply damaged victims' self-esteem. According to Hinduja & Patchin, adolescence is a critical period for the formation of self-identity, but the behaviors, such as insults, that stem from cyberbullying can seriously weaken their self-worth. The research also shows that victims usually lose their self-esteem due to the cyberbullying, which further strengthens their anxieties and depressions. The low self-esteem could let them to query their abilities, and also they will be at disadvantages in their futures' works and studies [14].

### 2.3.3 Negative Impacts on Social Relationships

Cyberbullying also has deep negative impacts on adolescents' social relationships. Victims are usually gradually separated from their friends because of cyberbullying, which breaks victims' social networks and also further intensifies their aloneness. In most situations, adolescents are afraid of being bullied to avoid communicating with their friends and families, which leads to a breakdown in trust.

### 2.3.4 Academic Performance Declining

In academic aspects, cyberbullying can directly influence teenagers' performances in their studies. Cyberbullying victims are often hard to pay attention to their studies due to psychological pressures and would decline their study efficiencies. This not only impacts their academic grade

but also leads to their absences from school [15]. Long-term psychological pressure can affect the cognitive functions of victims and may also result in consistently low academic performance. If these problems are not solved, the victims' academic backwardness could cause them to resist learning and ultimately affect their long-term development.

Cyberbullying is causing significant harm to a group of US teenagers. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the factors that contribute to cyberbullying and analyze how they lead to and exacerbate the problem.

## 3. Factors Contributing to Cyberbullying Among American Adolescents

### 3.1 The Roles of Social Media

Social media platforms are convenient for teenagers to socialize and express themselves, but at the same time, these platforms also become an origin to produce cyberbullying issues. From multiple perspectives, the cyberbullying problems are not only the structure problem of the social media platforms but also closely associated with governments, communities, families, and behaviors of teenagers themselves.

The design features of social media contribute to the prevalence of cyberbullying to some degree. Social media's anonymity, wide spread, and timeliness make the cyberbullying much more concealed and deeply influenced. According to Kowalski et al., the widespread use of social media increases the risk that teenagers will be bullied, as the form of cyberbullying is no longer limited to the face-to-face conflict but now includes the behaviors such as insults, threats, and the spreading of rumors through social media. The design of social media provides convenience to these behaviors; for instance, on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, users can send messages or comment anonymously; this makes it easier for perpetrators to bully without revealing their identities [16]. Moreover, the speed of information dissemination on these platforms is fast, which leads to deteriorated content being separated quickly; victims are hard to get rid of this.

### 3.2 Lack of Organization

The absence of government, communities, and families is also a factor that leads teenagers to suffer from cyberbullying. Although the US government and some social media platforms have made some laws and policies to target cyberbullying, some of these measures are hard to execute and achieve. Bauman found that although there are some related laws, there is still a lack of enforcement

in schools and communities responding to cyberbullying. Furthermore, families lack efficient monitoring and guidance when teenagers use social media. Many parents do not completely understand the use of social media, particularly its complexity and potential risks [17]. Gundlapalli found that many parents underestimate the long-term impact of cyberbullying on teenagers' mental health; therefore, they cannot offer timely psychological support and intervene after adolescents suffer from cyberbullying [18].

### **3.3 The Behavior Patterns of Teenagers**

Furthermore, the cyberbullying problem is also influenced by the behavior patterns of teenagers themselves. Teenagers who use social media much more frequently are much easier to be the victims of cyberbullying. Also, when adolescents with low self-esteem suffer from cyberbullying issues, they usually find it hard to deal with negative comments effectively, thus leading to psychological troubles. Additionally, when teenagers use social media, they often lack self-protection awareness and are easy to disclose personal privacy by trusting others, which leads to their personal information being abused or spread maliciously. Therefore, these factors significantly increase teenagers' vulnerability when using social media, making them more susceptible to bullying on these platforms.

### **3.4 Systemic Effects of Factors**

All the factors above work together, which lead to short-term and long-term negative impacts on American teenagers' cyberbullying issues. Firstly, the anonymity and rapid spreading of information on social media platforms make the bullying behaviors difficult to track, and victims find it hard to get out of being bullied. This anonymity leads victims under great psychological pressures in the short or long term, such as anxiety, fear, and low self-esteem [19]. It is often difficult to receive timely psychological counseling for these negative emotions, especially when the government, society, and family do not provide adequate support, which can exacerbate these problems [20].

In the long run, teenagers who are lack the supports from organizations and families may be at risk of developing mental health issues, and could even face more serious consequences, such as depression, and suicide [21]. Additionally, the social skills and sense of self of victims could suffer lasting damage due to their long-term exposure to a cyberbullying environment, which could break their relationships and lead to a decline in their academic performance. Moreover, the lack of awareness about personal privacy protection in adolescent behavior patterns allows bullies to use victims' personal information to launch re-

peated attacks, further exacerbating long-term psychological trauma.

To sum up, the structure and design of social media, lack of families' supports, flaws in social systems, and behaviors of teenagers themselves can all lead to the complexity and difficulty of addressing cyberbullying.

## **4. Suggestions of Controlling Cyberbullying among Youth in America**

Because of the significant negative effects that cyberbullying can have on adolescents, the government, social media platforms, schools, and families all need to work together to combat the problem and create a more loving and supportive environment for adolescents in America. Diverse strategies are necessary to address and prevent cyberbullying issues, while also taking into account the intricacies and nuances of the network environment. This not only needs to develop and enforce effective policies and regulations, but also the enhancement of digital literacy and education on how to use the internet correctly.

Specifically, the first and most important way is to promote digital citizenship education in schools. This kind of education should be adapted to students' ages and teach them how to behave politely online, maintain empathy, respect others' differences, and take responsibility for their actions. According to a study by Hinduja and Patchin, bullying incidents decreased by 50% in schools with anti-bullying initiatives. Furthermore, the projects function better if students are involved in their development because they are more likely to accept the ideas they have contributed to [22].

Secondly, parents' participation is also a key solution to the cyberbullying problem. Children should be able to openly discuss their online experiences with their parents and be aware of their online behaviors, but parents must respect their children's privacy. At the same time, parents should prepare their children for internet use and teach them how to deal with cyberbullying issues. Parents should talk to their children often about suitable behavior on the Internet. Provide them with particular examples that can help them make good decisions. Parents should elaborate on the harmful effects of cyberbullying, what to do if it occurs to them, or what to do if they feel they are losing control of their technology use. Set online time-limiting principles and implement them. Get children more involved in offline activities. If the child is bullying others online or is a victim of cyberbullying, parents should consider talking to a clinician or mental health counselor at an adolescent treatment program. These counselors can help them reduce their use of social media, find healthy ways

to cope with feelings, build self-esteem, and address the underlying issues that may be the main cause of their behavior [23]. According to Ybarra and Mitchell's research, teenagers are less likely to be targeted by cyberbullying if parents support their children and engage in active communication with them [24].

Thirdly, to prevent cyberbullying, people can improve technology systems. Social media platforms can enhance their reporting mechanisms and algorithmic frameworks to make it simpler to identify and address cyberbullying. Dinakar et al. suggest that advanced methodologies, like machine learning, can effectively aid in recognizing detrimental online activities and potential cases of cyberbullying [25].

Finally, legislation needs to align with the evolving digital landscape. There is a pressing need for legislators to enact more comprehensive regulations addressing cyberbullying and safeguarding victims. Presently, the legal stance on cyberbullying differs significantly among states, with some yet to implement any cyberbullying-specific laws [26]. Finally, a coherent and robust legislative approach at the national level is required to counteract cyberbullying effectively in America.

Therefore, it is crucial for countries, social organizations, and individuals to collaborate to effectively address cyberbullying issues. This approach not only ensures prompt resolution but also enables long-term prevention, avoidance, and alleviation of these problems.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, cyberbullying poses a serious threat to the American teenagers; its consequences are direct and long-term, affecting various aspects of their mental health, social relationships, and academic performance. By studying the structural problems of social media, social organizations, lack of family support, and teenagers' behaviors, it is evident that cyberbullying is not only frequently happening but also difficult to track. The anonymity of social media, combined with the rapid dissemination of information and extensive coverage, means that victims are unable to overcome their psychological traumas in a timely manner.

By examining the systemic factors that contribute to this issue, we have identified a clear need for collaborative action. It is necessary for parties to work together. Firstly, schools should implement digital citizenship education to teach teenagers how to express themselves responsibly in the network environment, while simultaneously cultivating respect for others and empathy. The digital citizen education can effectively decrease the incidence of school bullying. Secondly, parental involvement is also

the key; they need to maintain active communication with their children and know about children's online activities; they also need to provide emotional support as needed. Effective guidance from parents can help reduce the risk of cyberbullying among teenagers. Furthermore, social media platforms must improve their technical measures and use advanced algorithms and reporting mechanisms to detect and address bullying more quickly. Finally, the government must enhance legislation to ensure that victims receive effective legal protections in the digital age, and provide strong institutional protections to prevent cyberbullying.

This paper contributes to the study of "the impact of social media on adolescents" by highlighting the negative effects of cyberbullying on American teenagers and proposing meaningful recommendations. The insights presented are significant for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by youth in the digital age.

In the future, new methods and perspectives can further explore the complexity and systemic problems of cyberbullying. Lasting research is very important in making more effective policies and intervening measures to ensure teenagers can get comprehensive protections for their safety and mental health. Further research is needed on cases of cyberbullying among adolescents in different countries, comparing diverse experiences and analyzing best practices. This exploration can identify ways to strengthen cooperation, enabling a collective response to this serious social issue. This approach will help us create a safer and more inclusive online environment that promotes the healthy growth and comprehensive development of teenagers.

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