

# The Consequences Of Cyberbullying On The Mental Health Of High School Students In Fiji.

<sup>1</sup>Victor Mafone Alasa, <sup>2</sup>Ashna Siwan, <sup>3</sup>Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya & <sup>4</sup>Ranita Devi

School of Education, College of Humanities and Education,  
Fiji National University, Fiji.

\*Corresponding Author's e-mail: [victor.alasa@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:victor.alasa@fnu.ac.fj)

## Abstract

The digital revolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has exacerbated recorded cases of cyberbullying in Fiji, especially between 2010 till date. This challenge prompted the debate and subsequent passing into law an Online Safety Bill by the Fiji Parliament in 2019. Children and young people's core have been greatly shaped by digital-enabled devices- from the computers and smartphones usage for schoolwork and gaming to socialization with friends through social platforms. The highly mobile, interactive and engaging nature of screen-based devices and sometimes, their pervasive use has become a concern for both parents and teachers alike. These concerns are genuinely about the growing rate of debilitating online activities involving deliberate harassment against young people. The purpose of this study was examine the effects of cyberbullying on the mental health of high school students in Fiji Island. The participants of the survey were high school students drawn from the Sigatoka Methodist College, Western Division of Fiji. The study determine the correlation between cyberbullying and its detrimental impact on the mental wellbeing of high school students through the analysis of the data gathered from 53 student participants in classes year 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13. Three option-based questions were qualitatively analyzed through a content-based approach. While the quantitative data was analyzed by vivid statistics and individual t-test. The result indicated that indelible impression occurs in young people who have gone through the horrendous act of cyberbullying. The integral place of rendering the needed assistance to these victims of was emphasized. In addition, students are prone to becoming suicidal, depressed and even violent if they do not receive any support. The role of parents and teachers in observing behavior changes in students was highlighted identify and confront cyberbullying cases in schools.

**Key words:** *Cyberbullying, mental health, digital, internet, high school students.*

## Introduction

The expeditious advancement and utilization of social networking platforms and the rapid surge in the total number of young people acknowledging to have encountered cyberbullying either as the tormentor, sufferer, or onlooker generated an appalling demand for study in this subject to establish the link between cyberbullying and the mental health of teenagers. Cyberbullying is the use of ICT to reinforce

antagonistic offenses committed by a person or a set of individuals [Belsey , 2004]. High school students for various reasons: ranging from entertainment, communication, gaming, social communication and undertaking academic research and school assignments, use the internet. In 2019, the National Substance Abuse, and Advisory Council carried out a study in 796 primary and secondary schools in Fiji. The data gathered from the study declared that 56% of students had been victims of cyberbullying in

2018. Another study carried out highlighted that 33 % of young people have faced aggressive behavior while using online platforms [Anderson, 2018]. The continuous increase of ICT usage among young people illustrated the need for a substantial comprehension of societal imbalance (sex, culture) in cyberbullying exploitation and its relation with mental health problems such as melancholy and harsh behavior.

Cyberbullying is distinct from traditional bullying because of the anonymity provided by the internet. Cyberbullies often escape from taking responsibility for their actions owing to the anonymity feature [Belsey, 2004], hence enabling cyberbullies to act more heinously knowing that the identification is unknown to the victim. Horrendous criticisms regarding people's opinions are made by personally attacking an individual based on their gender, ethnicity, class, color, and even physical appearance. There are numerous forms of cyberbullying- sharing, i. inconsiderate and vindictive posts regarding someone, ii. intimidating, disclosing information, and spreading rumors. Accordingly, dejection and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is major iii. symptom illustrated by cyber-victims [Anderson, 2018]. The students in high school are in the process of psychological development and falling victims to iv. cyberbullying leave the young minds traumatized. Being involved in cyberbullying, has become a crucial aggravation for students, and knowing that online sharing is permanent, high school students feel humiliated, isolated, powerless, depressed, and even have suicidal thoughts [Grigg, 2010]. ii.

The cyberbullying cases have drastically increased over the years in Fiji; there has been a 12% increase iii. in online harassment cases just from August 2020 until May 2021. As more students get access to online iv. platforms due to the virtual classes implemented in high schools due to the COVID-19 lockdown, their safety becomes an issue of great concern. Cyberspace allows for anonymity and 24hours access to cyberspace opens doors to perpetrators to victimize the innocent. Young people also believe that they have the right to express their views on social platforms, and they end up disregarding the impact of their actions on other people. The study has indicated that as the number of internet users increase teenagers must learn the strategies of online safety.

The amount of time young people spend on social networking sites has drastically increased post-COVID-19 because all of the high schools are using online platforms to conduct virtual classes. The students easily become victims of cyberbullying and sometimes even become the perpetrator themselves and this leaves a mark on their lives. Hence, it is vital to understand the link between cyberbullying and the mental health of young people. The purpose of this study was to establish a link between cyberbullying and the mental health of students in a high school. The constructed analysis was on the current trend of cyberbullying cases in Fiji using the Sigatoka Methodist College as the study context, and it equally examined the role of teachers and parents in managing cyberbullying cases in Fiji.

The aim of this study was to examine the correlation between cyberbullying and the mental health of high school students in Fiji. The objectives were to:

- i. identify student's perceptions of cyberbullying
- ii. examine the impact of cyberbullying and student's academic and social development
- iii. assess the incidence of cyberbullying and investigate the link between cyberbullying and the mental health of students in Fiji.
- iv. examine the role of parents and teachers in cyberbullying.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is your view regarding cyberbullying?
- How does cyberbullying affect your schoolwork and social relationships?
- What is the relationship between cyberbullying and mental health illnesses like loneliness, suicidal thoughts etc.?
- What are the roles of parents and teachers in cyberbullying?

Despite the issuance of various circulars and the formulation of policies, there has been no study conducted to determine the impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of students in Fiji. It was reported that there has been a drastic increase in the number of cyberbullying-related cases pertaining to high school students and the percentage of cases is gradually increasing [Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021]. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of empirical studies in this direction.

## Literature Review

Bullying is a well-known term by people, people are aware of the consequences of bullying, and cyberbullying is a more heinous branch of bullying. Cyberbullying is a purposeful belligerent behavior repeatedly committed by either a group or a single person through internet-based media against another person who is unequipped to assist herself/ himself [Dooley et al., 2012]. Over the last decade, cyberbullying, researchers and the media have discerned an insidious behavior. Being a burgeoning subject, studies surrounding cyberbullying has investigated copious characteristics of the manners with mental health being the focal point of the group of people involved in the study. The studies particularly revolve around teen adults, as the various forms of bullying is ubiquitous among them [Patchin & Hinduja, 2015]. Nevertheless, it is vital to examine the other ages of people who are less likely to indulge in cyberbullying-related activities to examine the abstract data gathered through prior researches. The impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of people have been found to exacerbate its incidences with age [Runions et al., 2018]. The data gathered during the research confirmed that the mental health of the young deters as the increase in age. According to Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 634.1 thousand people in Fiji are regularly online which shows an increase by a whopping 42 thousand since 2020, therefore, providing a large statistic to identify cyberbully, cyber victims, and the adverse effect of cyberbullying on their mental health [The Fiji Sun, 2019]. This study examined the self-perception of students, the impact of cyberbullying on the academic, social, and emotional development of students, elaborated the incidences of cyberbullying in Fiji, determined the link between cyberbullying and the mental health of students, and analyzed the role teachers and parents in cyberbullying cases.

Social platforms on the internet have become the fastest mode of communication amongst individuals all over the world. In 2009, there was a drastic increase in the number of people accessing the internet for communication and by 2012, the market became flooded with iPhone, smartphones thus increasing the medium through which teen adults gain access to online platforms making themselves prone to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is determined by classroom factors and self-perception of students

when a student is determined not to become a casualty of cyberbullying than the chances of that student becoming a victim of cyberbullying increases. In schools, it is not uncommon to observe that students have classified themselves into groups (popular groups, rich, smart students, sports-oriented, poor) and this group is maintained outside of school as well. There have been various links made to the categorizing of students into groups to cyberbullying. Teens are at such a phase where developments take place at a rapid pace and in the course of development the affair of personality, 82% of teens [Bannink et al., 2014] rely upon social media to mold their personality. Hence, teen adults refer to attitudes and circumstances that make them ethical and refrain from keeping the company of those that make them feel inferior for who they are. This is observable in a teen as his/ her perceptions in embracing their evolving traits play a profound part in personal and emotional growth.

After a comprehensive examination of the data gathered, it can be inferred that cyberbullying has a long-lasting effect on the mental development of the youth (Questionnaire). Hence, cyberbullying has a grave impact on the self-esteem of young adults. The intimidation and harassment through online platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, has even led to 66% of attempted suicide cases in Fiji [The Fiji Sun, 2019]. Students with psychological issues are more likely to practice cyberbullying related behavior, as they are aware that they only have virtual existence, they can choose to remain anonymous, yet the data illustrate that the cyber-victim is aware of the person who is targeting them through online platforms. In addition, there is very little monitoring done by the parents, and as the students spend most of their time being online this freedom provides them with an opportunity to be irresponsible. Students identify cyberspace as an effortless method of displaying atrocious and malign behavior by posting an embarrassing video or photo, spreading gossip, or digitally harassing other students. A comparison of the statistics from the researches indicated that approximately 40 % of students become victims of cyberbullying, further confirming that 19% of students aging from 10 to 17 years become either victims or offenders of cyberbullying [Hemphill & Heerde, 2014].

Students utilize the internet for various reasons like research, entertainment, online games, online applications, leisure reading, shopping, selling, and most increasingly for communication. Researchers have implied that cyber-victims tend to develop psychological issues like melancholy, rejection, sadness, low self-confidence and anxiety [Dooley et al., 2012]. An emphasis has also been made on the poignant and psychological harm of the cyber-victim. The students are overwhelmed by the emotional stress and are unable to cope with their academic work. The psychological issues prevent the students from committing to their studies. Students need to pay attention to the lessons in the classroom, but becoming victims of cyberbullying hinders their focus on learning. An approximately 62% of students fail to concentrate on their academic work, 5% of the affected students claim that they are unable to forget the cyberbully [Kowalski et al., 2012]. Students who are victims of cyberbullying have poor marks because cyberbullying creates psychological problems especially in terms of self-esteem thus contributing to poor academic results. Missing school is another effect of cyberbullying, students prefer to remain at home so the cyberbullies and witnesses cannot harass or make fun of them [Lazuras et al., 2013]. The victims of cyberbullying tend to have little to no friends; it has been observed that the lack of support from fellow friends is another contributing factor that hinders the daily attendance of students to school thus contributing towards poor academic achievement. In some cases, the victims of cyberbullying isolate themselves in an attempt to avoid other students to save themselves from being bullied online. The isolation further develops into a depression that disrupts their concentration and contributes to low academic performance.

Students will not have any self-worth and will question any form of relationship existing in their lives [Mishna, 2020]. Self-acceptance comes from maintaining a healthy development of the mind through proper emotional development; a student can develop a profound personality through proper emotional development. Emotional disturbances like questioning one's self-worth or confidence will eventually lead to a mental crisis [Meyer, 2014]. The emotional problems faced by students are also seen as an intellectual affliction, body suffering, perturbation, melancholy, and lack of self-confidence. The limitation to successful emotional development in

students has been identified as stress, anxiety, and abuse [Mishna, 2020].

As the development in technology is taking place, most of the students in urban, semi-rural, and rural schools have found access to online networking platforms in Fiji. Students can access information at their fingertips and it is a good achievement for Fiji, being a small nation, however, most of the students are not practicing ethical behavior while they are using online platforms. In the year 2017, a whopping 237 cases of cyberbullying and 8 accounts of sexting cases were recorded in Secondary schools throughout Fiji [8]. In 2015, a year 10 student of a prominent school in the Northern Vanua Levu committed suicide because her boyfriend had circulated explicit images of her. According to the national newspaper, there has been a drastic 30% increase in reported cyberbullying cases in Fiji [The Fiji Sun, 2019].

Cyberbullying is becoming a common occurrence amongst students as students are adapting to online platforms on a daily basis. The pessimistic influence of online activity promotes unethical behavior from students, for instance, the females may start to display violent and disreputable behavior. Earlier in March 2021, a high school student from Sigatoka committed suicide because of abusive comments on her TikTok account; the user interactivity is unmanageable thus making the negativity to helplessness especially since last year when students are learning from home via online platforms. Internet access without supervision and restriction has been perilous for Fiji, evident of the raising number of cyberbullying cases in Fiji. The role of cyberspace was to provide information to all, however, a few antagonistic hypocrites changed the medium to harass, intimidate, and, bullying through online mediums. In an attempt to minimize the drastic increase in cyberbullying cases in schools in Fiji, the government passed the Online Safety Act as the new law to protect all citizens from online trolling, pornography, cyberbullying, and tenacious online behavior, which intends to harm other people [Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021]. To add on, the Fiji Police and the Online Safety Commission have formed a group to trace and minimize cyberbullying cases. According to Anne Dun, the Commissioner for Online Safety in Fiji, 90 students had committed suicide due to cyberbullying and the Commission had been put together to take drastic measures to ensure

the safety of people using internet platforms [The Fiji Sun,2019].

Cyberbullying has a pessimistic and life-long impact on the mental development of students. It generates the notion of desertion, segregation, lack of self-confidence, depression and consternation. In severe cases, students tend to develop Acute Stress Disorder; the victims can further develop habits of violent behavior, substance abuse, anti-social behavior and poor intellectual development [Renati et al., 2012]. A few witnesses to cyberbullying developed mild symptoms of anti-social disorder. When students become victims of cyberbullying, they can remain traumatized until they reach or even past adulthood. During teen life, students are trying to find their true selves and develop idealistic personalities, and when they are victimized or exposed to cyberbullying, they begin to develop trust, anger and self-confidence issues. The same student will find difficulty in developing relationships as they were deprived of friendship during their younger days. The students lack self-confidence, look down upon themselves, and expect other people to do the same. Students begin to experience mental health problems after being victimized by cyberbullying [Perren et al., 2010]. Students develop fear as the cyberspace is far reaching henceforth they refrain from asking for help from teachers and professionals, this leads to the psychotic breakdown of teenagers, some might not even want to complete high school and develop a negative self-personality. As the collected data indicates, if the students are not provided with assistance to cope with cyberbullying it pushes them towards isolation and they opt to harm themselves. Many times students resort to committing suicide to free themselves of the mental suppression they are facing.

Approaching students regarding cyberbullying at an early stage might be the key factor in minimizing the impact of cyberbullying in student's mental health. There is a need for parents to spend quality time with children to show care, and love, and to teach children the importance of standing up for themselves. It becomes the responsibility of parents to motivate children to discuss issues of concern, for instance, if they are being harassed online they should be comfortable to discuss the matter with their parents, also, parents need to clarify the contrast between telling and tattling [Sourander et al., 2010]. Through

the supervision and monitoring of their children's online activity parents are instilling ethical values in their children. As the collected data illustrates, if parents are unsupportive, children who become victims to cyberbullying tend to avoid reporting the matter to authorities, the parents need to assure their child that it is important to stand up to injustice. Parents need to familiarize themselves with the gadgets to ensure monitoring of their child's online activity to minimize the issue of cyberbullying.

Moreover, schools tend to play a vital role in minimizing cyberbullying cases but the teachers are heads of schools are overwhelmed with challenges that hinders in effectively decreasing the cases of cyberbullying. The major challenge for teachers in minimizing cyberbullying is that teachers are ill-equipped in catering cyberbullying cases and most of the schools do not have professionals to apply the accurate theory to console the student who is a victim to cyberbullying. Most of the teachers are not utilizing the social network platforms thus they are unable to monitor the student's online activity. It becomes the responsibility of school heads to organize workshops and professional development sessions to better equip the teachers in effectively monitoring and handling cyberbullying cases. The various universities should also come aboard and assemble a unit that can be offered to pre-service students, dedicated to confronting cyberbullying victims and perpetrators. It has been observed that most cyberbully victims refrain from seeking help from teachers because the students feel that teachers might discriminate against them for the content through which they are being bullied online. However, if teachers are able to identify a victim of cyberbullying they need to empathize with the child, provide them with mental encouragement to find out more details regarding the incident. The teachers can also request outside help for instance the cybercrime unit will be more than willing to locate the cyberbully to keep the students safe. It becomes the teacher's responsibility to inform the parents of the student and to monitor the student's behavior and guide him/ her towards optimistic ways of overcoming the traumatic event. There will also be a need to identify the cyberbully and if the cyberbully is a student then it again becomes the responsibility of the teachers to guide and mold the cyberbully to change his/ her mindset and refrain from harming other student's reputations through cyberbullying [Meyer, 2014].

Teachers vary in their methods of dealing with matters related to cyberbullying, the method in dealing with the cyberbullying cases may also depend on the student, parents and the head of the school thus the heads of school create awareness and arrange for professional development sessions to ensure that the teachers are well prepared to handle cyber-victims and cyberbullies.

In summary, it inferred that cyberbullying is a common occurrence in high schools and it has a devastating impact on the student's mental health especially in terms of academic achievements and lack of self-confidence. The data also illustrated that cyberbullying has crawled into the mainstream social media, emails and social networking platforms. Either students spend most of their time on the internet for entertainment or for educational purposes; the daily hours spend online results in the increase in cyberbullying cases [Pham & Adesman, 2015]. Researches have also placed emphasis on cyberbullying having an impact on the mental health of students throughout their lifetime. Teachers are unable to solve and cater for issues pertaining to cyberbullying. There is a need for a new approach to be embraced by schools to constructively cater for cyberbullying cases. The entire school community, administrators, teachers, parents, students and all stakeholders should actively participate in learning about anti-cyberbullying schemes so that everyone involved around students can learn about zero tolerance against bullying. Parents need to be informed if their child is a victim or the bully so they can take prevention measures at home as well. Teachers should take an initiative in arming themselves with ways through which they can counter the cases of cyberbullying.

### **Materials and methods**

This study, therefore determined the link between cyberbullying and its detrimental impact on the mental health of high school students through the analysis of the data gathered from 53 students in Years 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. These students use electronic gadgets to access online social networking websites daily. The methodology scrutinized the various measures that were chosen to gather detailed information from young people regarding the use of ICT and its impact on their mental health. Thus, it was necessary to combine ontological and epistemological assumptions to gather and examine

the necessary data set. Ontological supposition placed accentuation on hypothesis and language to collect information and the epistemological assumption through interpretivist paradigm that were used to differentiate between the experience and perspective of the participants. The research employed mixed-method research to integrate qualitative and quantitative data that was collected. In addition, the mixture of the qualitative and quantitative methods of study enabled the researcher to scrutinize cyberbullying and mental health issues in words and quantity.

The data were collated from the student participants of Sigatoka Methodist College because the school is located in Sigatoka Town, and most of the students have access to the internet. In addition, these high school students are of the digital native generation thus they are familiar with all types of ICT and parents, and guardians provide little to no supervision in regard to ICT used by students. To carry out this research effectively, 53 school students was surveyed in relation to the usage of ICT and its impact on their mental health. Five teachers were involved in an informal discussion to determine the role of teachers and parents in cyberbullying cases. During the informal discussions, the teachers gave their opinions on what they have been observing in the classrooms and while using the social networking platforms. The discussion was a critical part of collecting data. The mixed-method consequent descriptive scheme was utilized [Creswell & Clark, 2007]. At the initial juncture of the research, the quantitative method was used to examine cyberbullying and its impact on high school students with questionnaires that were sent to the students through Viber and email. The second phase of the study employed a qualitative method of interview.

### **Research context**

Sigatoka Methodist College is located beside the Melrose Bridge in the heart of Sigatoka Town; this school has been enrolling 700 and more students per year. An approximate of 70 % of the students are from farming backgrounds and they live in near-by areas. Most of the students have their smart phones and tablets, the students who are unable to afford such gadgets are often found in internet shops after school and on Saturdays. They find it vital to update their status or to upload videos for likes and comments as a part of belonging to this generation. Whilst at it,

many students either become the victims of cyberbullying or are developing into perpetrators themselves. The students are not prepared with the tools with which they face cyberbullies. This chapter will focus on the method and tools employed to gather data.

Technology has grazed all aspects of education from preschool to tertiary. The administration process in schools and the teaching methods have also been altered to be on par with technology. It has an enormous impact on the student learning outcome because technology has dramatically changed the learning and teaching processes. This shift has opened the doors to a world of threat for young people and has crippled the older generation. Students are introduced to technology in schools and through their friends, it is essential for the students to keep updated with the latest applications and devices as it is the technological era. For instance, the introduction of OT and Computer in the school curriculum ensures the grasp of technological skills for the students but their parents are left behind thus, they lack the knowledge needed to protect their child from online abusers.

### Research results

The data was collected through 53 questionnaires sent to the participants through (45 participants) emails and (The Fiji Sun, 2019) Viber messages. The questions were derived from the research questions. The questions were mainly multiple-choice questions where the participants had to choose from the provided options, and some questions required the

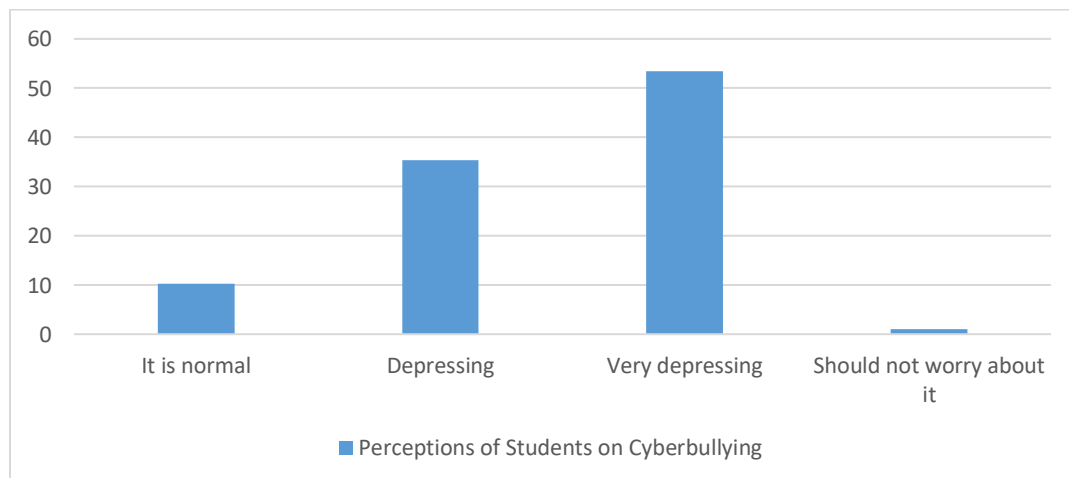
participant to select more than one answer, there were also three short answer questions. The questions dwelled upon cyberbullying, its impact on mental health, and the role of parents and teachers. The study was based on students; therefore, they were able to reflect on themselves whilst completing the questionnaire. 31 girls and 22 boys of which 15 students were in Year 10, 9 from Year 11, 25 students from Year 12, and 9 students from Year 10, completed the questionnaires. All of these students had access to either a smartphone or laptop at home.

Three option-based questions were qualitatively analyzed; the answers to these questions were examined through a content-based approach. The answers that were selected by most of the students were counted as per the content-based approach. The quantitative data was analysed by vivid statistics and individual t-test. The vivid statistics were utilized to identify the impact of cyberbullying on students and student's perceptions of cyberbullying. An individual t-test was carried out to determine the role of parents and teachers in cyberbullying.

### Discussion

The instrument inquired the participants about their perception of cyberbullying as something that is normal, or should not be taken seriously, is depressing, or very depressing. As illustrated in Figure 1, the results indicated that the student's perception of cyberbullying is that it is very depressing. The other selected answer was that cyberbullying is depressing.

**Figure 1 Students Perceptions on Cyberbullying**



To analyze how the students were affected due to cyberbullying the questionnaire had 10 varying impacts for the students to select from (question 14). The participating students were able to choose from a range of impacts related to cyberbullying. Vivid statistics were utilized to examine the mean variant of the individual impact.

As illustrated in the table given below, suicidal thoughts were selected by most of the participants and derived a mean of 4.40. The second common impact of cyberbullying was depression with a mean of 4.30 and violence was the third most commonly selected option with a mean of 4.10 by participating students.

**Table 2 Impact of Cyberbullying on the Mental Health of Students**

Response	Max Value	Standard Deviation
Depression	39	4.30
Violence	34	4.10
Truancy	18	3.12
Anti-social behavior	12	2.3
Addiction to virtual world	24	2.25
Loneliness	19	2.13
Absenteeism	5	1.23
Anxiety	12	2.3
Low self esteem	33	4.79
Suicidal thoughts	45	4.40

The questionnaire had three questions to conduct the qualitative analysis: What is the impact of cyberbullying on young people? What will you do if you witness cyberbullying? What is the role of parents, and teachers in cyberbullying cases? The answers to the individual questions were thoroughly examined and categorized according to similar responses. Most of the participants said that cyberbullying had an enormous impact on the mental health of young people, namely through selecting suicidal thoughts, depression, and violence. The horrendous act of the perpetrator leaves the students in an emotional trauma. Students are unable to get access to moral support as they are afraid of getting into trouble.

The results indicated that not only the victims but also the perpetrators of cyberbullying are prone to having suicidal thoughts. A study undertaken corroborated a strong link between a victim and a perpetrator of cyberbullying and the female victims were prone towards suicidal thoughts [Olweus, 2012]. In the last

few years, there have been many cyberbullying cases whereby the victim has either committed or attempted to commit suicide. There have been 72 suicides and 66 cases of attempted suicides in the year 2020 alone [The Fiji Sun, 2019]. Suicide is related to the mental health of young people. In young people, suicide cases are related to depression, and low self-esteem. When young people are cyberbullied they feel embarrassed and ashamed to seek help and often are not confident to seek professional help. These victims suffer from extreme emotional and mental problems. In the previous years, cyberbullying has been deemed as an offense and anti-cyberbullying law should be enforced to reduce cyberbullying. The qualitative data shows the impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of students. The options that were commonly selected were suicidal thoughts, depression, and violence. The mean of each option indicated that attempting suicide had a higher mean value. This was consented to by previous research that indicated the link between cyberbullying and the mental health of



young people [Patchin & Hinduja, 2015]. Their research illustrates the importance of parents and teachers to recognize students undergoing extreme stress.

The parental relationship with their children plays a vital role in determining the children's characteristics, and identity. Cyberbullying largely takes place in the family's context [Gasior, 2009]. The parental relationship with the children and the knowledge of that parents have about cyberbullying has an important role in the prevention of cyberbullying cases. Parents who are aware of digital bullying were able to bring a decrease in the cases [Strom & Strom, 2005], however, when parents are unable to comprehend the causes and impacts of cyberbullying they contribute to the increase in the cases of digital bullying. The analysed data illustrates that the ignorance of parents in learning about social networking platforms and information communications technology leaves them helpless in terms of monitoring the children's cyber activity. However, there are parents with no education and this factor influences their ability in creating awareness about the responsible use of online platforms. According to the collected data, most of the students prefer to confide in their friends rather than their parents. Parents need to create a bond with their children so that their child could feel comfortable in approaching their parents about their negative experiences.

Teachers play a pivotal role in addressing cyberbullying cases as students might the teacher a trusted friend. Although cyberbullying cases happen outside of the school, the reason it happens may start from school. Hence, teachers must keep on the lookout for signs of stress and depression expressed by their students. Teachers are a powerful force in teaching ethical behavior in daily life and while using cyberspace. The integration of responsible use of the internet in the various subjects apart from Computer and Office Technology is another method that teachers could employ to emphasize on the safe use of the internet.

### **Conclusion**

There is a need for further study on cyberbullying and the mental health of young people as the number of cyberbullying cases is growing at an alarming rate. Online harassment, abuse, and taunting have been

identified as common links between cyberbullying and the mental health of young people. The analysis of the data has indicated the link between cyberbullying and suicide cases among young people. It has been suggested that depression, hopelessness and impulsivity are causative agents for violence and suicidal thoughts [Patchin & Hinduja, 2015]. Cyber victims and bullies undergo depression and aggression. It is vital for parents and teachers to be aware of the impact of cyberbullying on young people. Becoming a victim of cyberbullying drastically influences the lives of young people. Sometimes the witnesses to cyberbullying might not provide any form of support to the victim, as they are scared of defamation, the cyber victims will find it difficult to discuss their internal conflicts despite being mentally tortured.

The data gathered from the study has established a link between the mental health of students and suicide. This needs to be stressed to parents, teachers, and counsellors to keep in mind while confronting students about sensitive issues. Cyberbullying is a growing concern in Fiji, and it has a devastating effect on the lives of young people. Parents, teachers, and counsellors need to collaborate and develop strategies to address cyberbullying cases from the beginning. Cyberbullying is a growing concern in our society and it will become a menace if measures are not put in place to minimize the number of cyberbullying cases. Young people need to be responsible while using online platforms as sometimes things are shared unintentionally as a joke but without consent from the people who own the post/ photo. The Online Safety Commission needs to be proactive in creating awareness on the safe use of online platforms. Most of the classes have begun through online modes; teachers are using Google Meet, Zoom, Viber, and Messenger to reach out to students during the lockdown. School and district counsellors with the Online Safety Commission must make it a priority to inform students and parents about responsible and safe behavior that should be practiced while using online platforms.

According to the gathered data, teachers are unsure of their role during cyberbullying cases. The policies and the behavior management policy contradicts in case of providing assistance to students there needs to be other teachers/ academic officers present, however, the policies state that a teacher must

maintain confidentiality in matters about students and the content that they have shared and/or posted. Some teachers are unaware of the method in which the online platforms work; hence, they are unsuccessful in providing the students with appropriate guidance. It becomes the responsibility of the school counsellor and the Online Safety Commission to create awareness on online safety protocols in all schools as school students spend most of their using online platforms, either for study or entertainment purposes.

## References

- Anderson, M. (2018). A majority of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Pew Research Center, [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org).
- Bannink R, Broeren S, van de Looij – Jansen P.M, de Waart F.G, Raat H (2014). Cyber and traditional bullying victimization as a risk factor for mental health problems and suicidal ideation in adolescents. *PLoS ONE* 9, 4. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261520584>
- Belsey, B. (2004). Cyberbullying. Retrieved from [www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca).
- Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(4), 801–804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428108318066>
- Dooley, J.J., Shaw, T.M., & Cross, D.S. (2012). The association between the mental health and behavioural problems of students and their reactions to cyber-victimization. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 9:275-289.
- European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9, 5, 520-538, [10.1080/17405629.2012.682358](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2012.682358).
- Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Digital bullying. Fiji Bureau of Statistics. October 22, 2021. <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/social-statistics/digital-bullying.html>
- Gasior, R.M. (2009). Parental awareness of cyberbullying. M.A. Thesis, California State University.
- Grigg, D.W. (2010). Cyber-Aggression: Definition and concept of cyberbullying. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 20, 2, 143 – 156. <https://doi.org/10.1375/ajgc.20.2.143>.
- Hemphill, S. & Heerde, J. (2014). Adolescent predictors of young adult cyberbullying perpetration and victimization among Australian youth. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*. 55. 10.1016. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263205160>
- Kowalski, R & Limber, S & Agatston, P. (2012). Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age. *American Journal of Psychiatry - AMER J PSYCHIAT*. 165. [10.1002/9780470694176](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470694176).
- Lazuras, L., Barkoukis, V., Ourda, D., & Tsorbatzoudis, H. (2013). A process model of cyberbullying in adolescence. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 881-887. [doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.015)
- Meyer, S., Raikes, H.A., Virmani, E.A., Waters, S., & Thompson, R.A. (2014). Parent emotion representations and the socialization of emotion regulation in the family. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 3, 2, 164–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025413519014>.
- Mishna, F., Sanders, J.E., McNeil, S. Fearing, G. & Kalenteridis, K. (2020). “If somebody is different”: A critical analysis of parent, teacher and student perspectives on bullying and cyberbullying. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 118, 105366, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105366>.
- Olweus, D. (2012). Cyberbullying: An overrated phenomenon?
- Patchin, J.W. & Hinduja, S. (2015). Measuring cyberbullying: Implications for Research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. 23. [10.1016/j.avb.2015.05.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.05.013).
- Perren, S., Dooley, J., Shaw, T. & Cross, D. (2010). Bullying in school and cyberspace: Associations

- with depressive symptoms in Swiss and Australian adolescents. *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health* 4, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1753-2000-4-28>
18. Pham, T., & Adesman, A. (2015). Teen victimization: Prevalence and consequences of traditional and cyberbullying. *Current Opinion in Paediatrics*, 27, 6, 748–756. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MOP.0000000000000290>
19. Renati, R., Berrone, C. & Zanetti, A. (2012). Morally disengaged and unempathic: Do Cyberbullies Fit These Definitions? An Exploratory Study. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*. 15. 391-8. [10.1089/cyber.2012.0046](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0046).
20. Runions, K.C., Salmivalli, C., Shaw, T., Burns, S., Cross, D., (2018). Beyond the reactive-proactive dichotomy: Rage, revenge, reward, and recreational aggression predict early high school bully and bully/victim status. *Aggressive Behavior*, 44, 5, 501-511, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21770>.
21. Sourander, A., Brunstein, K.A, Ikonen, M., Lindroos, J., Luntamo, T., Koskelainen, M., Ristkari, T., & Helenius, H., (2010). Psychosocial risk factors associated with cyberbullying among adolescents: a population-based study. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 67, 7:720-8. doi: [10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2010.79](https://doi.org/10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2010.79). PMID: 20603453.
22. Strom, P.S., & Strom, R.D. (2005). Cyberbullying by Adolescents: A preliminary assessment. *The Educational Forum*, 70, 21-36.
23. The Fiji Sun, (July 2019). More Females Complain of Cyberbullying Says Fiji's Online Safety Commissioner. <https://fijisun.com.fj>.