

Letter to Editor

Cyberbullying and Internet Gaming Disorders in Pakistan: Strategies for Mitigation

Saima Batool

Professor of Pediatrics, University College of Medicine and Dentistry University of Lahore, Pakistan

Correspondence: saima.batool30@gmail.com

Dear Editor,

Cyberbullying and internet gaming disorders (IGDs) have emerged as significant concerns in Pakistan, particularly among adolescents. This editorial explores the prevalence, impacts, and potential interventions for these issues, drawing on recent research and literature. The need for a multifaceted approach involving parents, educators, communities, and government is emphasized to protect vulnerable populations and promote a healthier digital environment.

The advent of widespread internet access in Pakistan has brought numerous benefits, yet it has also introduced challenges such as cyberbullying and internet gaming disorders (IGDs). These phenomena have serious implications for the mental health and well-being of adolescents. Given the relative novelty of these issues in the local context and the paucity of research, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive understanding and effective strategies for mitigation. According to a meta-analysis of earlier research, Asian youth have a high IGD prevalence¹

Defining Cyberbullying and IGDs

Cyberbullying lacks a universally accepted definition due to its complexity. Alipan and Skues provide a useful framework, describing it as behavior that intentionally harms victims using information and communication technology, perceived as harmful by

victims, and witnessed by bystanders as negative². IGDs are recognized in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a condition warranting further study.

Vulnerability of Adolescents

Adolescents are particularly susceptible to cyberbullying and IGDs due to the developmental changes they experience. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends against providing personal mobile phones to children under 13 years old, highlighting their vulnerability to risky behaviors³. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making and impulse control, is not fully developed in adolescents, making them prone to impulsive and risky behaviors, including cyberbullying and excessive gaming.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the incidence of cyberbullying and IGDs, as educational institutions transitioned to online learning. The anonymity and reach of cyberbullying, along with the ease of engaging in online gaming, have contributed to an increase in these behaviors during periods of social isolation³. Recent incidents in Pakistan underscore the severity of these issues. For instance, a news report in "Dawn" detailed the case of a 14-year-old boy in Lahore who committed familicide, reportedly triggered by frustration from losing in the game PUBG⁴. Such incidents, while extreme, highlight the potential for severe outcomes related to IGDs and the necessity for detailed psychiatric assessments to understand underlying vulnerabilities. Possible way forward:

A coordinated effort is required to address



Production and Hosting by KEMU

<https://doi.org/10.21649/akemu.v30i3.5663>

2079-7192/© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Annals of KEMU on behalf of King Edward Medical University Lahore, Pakistan.

This is an open access article under the CC BY4.0 license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

cyberbullying and IGDs. Islamic teachings advocate for free speech within moral and ethical boundaries⁵. Respecting these principles can help foster a cohesive and respectful digital society. Incorporating these values into digital education can aid in mitigating cyberbullying.

Parents and educators play critical roles in identifying and addressing cyberbullying and IGDs. Indicators of distress, such as withdrawal, aggressive behavior, and secrecy regarding online activities, should prompt discussions about digital conduct⁶. Regular communication about online etiquette and consistent limitations on media usage are recommended⁷. The United States is considering a "notice and takedown" model to restrict harmful online speech⁸. Pakistan's National Assembly should enact similar legislation to safeguard its digital environment. Furthermore, ongoing research and public education are essential to developing and updating guidelines for safe media use.

To conclude, Cyberbullying and IGDs pose significant risks to Pakistani adolescents. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from parents, educators, communities, and government agencies. By fostering awareness, implementing preventive measures, and enacting supportive legislation, Pakistan can better protect its youth and promote healthier digital interactions.

References

1. Stevens MW, Dorstyn D, Delfabbro PH, King DL. Global prevalence of gaming disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry* 2021;55(6):553-68.
2. Alipan A, Skues J, Theiler S, Wise L. Defining cyberbullying: A multiple perspectives approach. and Telemedicine (pp. 9-Annual Review of Cybertherapy and Telemedicine 2015. 2015:9-13.
3. Moreno L, Ariza MA, Cruz O, Calvo C, Fuster JL, Salinas JA, et al. Liposomal cytarabine for the treatment of leptomeningeal dissemination of central nervous system tumours in children and adolescents. *Anales de Pediatría (English Edition)*. 2016 1;85(5):274-e1.
4. Noreen S, Abbas H. The Loss of the Real Tale: The Postmodern Case of Migration in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies*. 2023 Dec 6;1(4):693-705.
5. Fahrizal Y, Andrea R. Religious Experiences of Muslim Students Who are Addicted to Online Games in Rural Areas in Countries with A Muslim Majority. *Indonesian Journal of Global Health Research*. 2024 May 20;6(5):2421-30.
6. Nasution FA, Effendy E, Amin MM. Internet gaming disorder (IGD): a case report of social anxiety. *Open access Macedonian journal of medical sciences*. 2019 Aug 8;7(16):2664.
7. Jorgensen C. The impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of teenagers. *Mental Health Matters*. 2020 Apr 1;7(2):26-8.
8. O'Shea B. A new method to address cyberbullying in the United States: The application of a notice-and-takedown model as a restriction on cyberbullying speech. *Fed. comm. IJ*. 2017;69:119.