My Generation and Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a big problem in our society. It is dangerous because it mostly happens in a place that is hard to supervise by adults - cyberspace. More and more children and teenagers have devices that enable them to communicate with others at all hours on a wide variety of social platforms. This means for someone like me I must make sure I am not sharing any personal information online to unknown people and be careful about what I post online.

Cyberbullying is bullying that happens through digital devices such as phones or computers. It often happens over social media, text messages, emails, instant messages, and gaming. Cyberbullying often takes the form of sending or sharing harmful or mean messages to other people to purposely hurt other people's feelings. Worldwide we have seen a massive increase in the cases of cyberbullying in the last two years, this is because of the huge increase in device time due to the covid-19 pandemic. Cyberbullies are most commonly girls and most victims are girls also.

Cyberbullying most commonly occurs on social media platforms. According to Wikipedia "Cyberbullying has become more common nowadays because of all the technology that children have access to. The most common apps that teenagers use to cyberbully are Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, unfortunately Cyberbullying has become harder to stop because parents and teachers are unaware of when and where it is happening." (3) The Instagram platform is the worst with 42% of all Cyberbullying according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. It reported in 2017 that "They found that 42 percent of Instagram users had been bullied on the platform compared to 37 percent for Facebook, 31 percent for Snapchat, 10 percent for YouTube and 9 percent for Twitter."

Cyberbullying can range from mean text messages to nasty comments on social media posts, or all the way to spreading false rumors about other people. One of the most common ways of cyberbullying is creating a fake Messenger profile and sending mean comments to people or bribing them to do something like send an embarrassing photo. This is then followed up by threatening to show the photo to the world unless the person does not do what is asked of them.

Another way of cyberbullying is leaving nasty comments on Instagram making the person feel like no one likes them or their posts and they feel disconnected from the social world, this is known as trolling. Sending nasty emails containing things like rude pictures, or bullying comments can leave victims feeling confused, sad, or threatened and start to suffer mental health conditions. Cyberbullying can also take the form of spreading rumors about other people usually online to begin with but can spread to in person as well.

The most worrying part of cyberbullying is the side effects. The side effects of cyber bullying can range from depression, to avoiding devices and social interactions altogether, abusing drugs, increased stress, anxiety, acting out violently, low self-esteem, all the way to extremes like eating disorders, self-harm and even suicide. In an article for Family Orbit, about Real-Life Cyberbullying there is a sad story. "Ten-year-old Ashlynn Conner was bullied so much that she begged and begged her mum to homeschool her." (2) Sadly, her mum said no, the bullying continued daily after school in the form of name calling over social media, to the point where Ashlynn took her own life. There are many other stories like this. More commonly, cyberbullying can have long-lasting emotional effects, even if the bullying has stopped, leaving children and teenagers with big mental health problems as adults.

Something that can make cyberbullying worse is keeping it to yourself and bottling it up inside. I learned myself that keeping it to yourself is one way to make yourself feel very depressed. My experience with cyberbullying was in a game. On that game you have a shop, and you sell things. There is also a chat function and once when I was playing the game another player sent me a nasty comment about my avatar. This comment made me feel sad, anxious, and angry. I have not played the game since because I am too scared.

In my family we have rules about devices to keep us safe. They are no devices in bedroom without parent supervision, no devices before 9 am and after 4 pm, if I see something online that makes me feel unsafe, I must immediately tell a parent, mum or dad must ask me before they post photos of me online, I am not allowed any social media accounts until I turn 13, and I must ask before I download new apps or visit new websites. Most importantly I must always talk to my parents about how I use the internet and anything that has made me feel unhappy or uncomfortable.

In conclusion cyberbullying is changing my generation in two ways, one good and one bad. The good part is that it is teaching us to be safe on devices and to talk to adults when you feel stressed or worried about things you have seen online. The bad part is that there are many people who do not have anyone to talk to about things they have seen online. These people are at risk of hurting themselves, becoming depressed or even taking their own life. We need to cut down on device time, regularly check on friends and neighbours and always talk to an adult you trust about anything that makes you feel unsafe.

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