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Students' Perception of Cyberbullying: An Empirical Study with Special Reference to Rural Areas of Hamirpur District, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: In the current world of ours, due to the increase use of technology, cyberbullying has become one of the biggest challenges, especially, for the youth. Abstract: The present study was intended to explore the perceptions of cyberbullying among students in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh in rural areas. The survey questionnaire-based data was collected from 143 students in the “*Block Bhoranj*” of Hamirpur District. Majority of the students had awareness of the term cyber bullying and possessed awareness of its harmful effects as well, as evident from the results of the study. Social media sites were the most popular venue for cyberbullying, with verbal bullying being the most regular type of cyberbullying reported. Other parents might want some context around the findings of the study: Students are more appropriate to tell friends or family members about the cyberbullying they experience rather than authorities. In general, the research emphasizes the creation of an education and awareness-raising activities that tackle for cyberbullying problem.

Keywords: cyberbullying, cybercrime, hate crime, cyberspace, Internet, student

I. Introduction:

Cyberbullying refers to the use of digital communication technologies, such as social media, instant messaging, and text messaging, to intimidate, harass, or threaten an individual or group.¹ This type of bullying can take many forms, including spreading rumors, posting embarrassing photos or videos, sending threatening messages, and creating fake profiles or websites.² Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur 24/7 and can be anonymous, making it difficult to identify and address.³ It is important to note that cyberbullying can have serious consequences for the victim, including anxiety, depression, and in some cases, suicide.⁴ Therefore, it is important for individuals, parents, educators, and law enforcement agencies to be vigilant and take steps to prevent cyberbullying.⁵

Cyberbullying is a pervasive and growing problem in today's digital age.⁶ With the rise of social media and other online platforms, individuals have greater access to the internet and the ability to communicate with others from anywhere in the world.⁷ While this has opened up new opportunities for connection and communication, it has also given rise to a new form of bullying: cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the use of digital technologies to harass, intimidate, or humiliate someone.⁸ This can take many different forms, including sending threatening messages, spreading rumours or lies about someone, or posting embarrassing photos or videos online.⁹ Unlike traditional bullying, which often takes place in person and can be witnessed by others, cyberbullying can happen anonymously and can reach a wide audience with just a few clicks.¹⁰ The effects of cyberbullying can be devastating, both for the victim and for those

¹Englander, "Defining cyberbullying", 151*Pediatrics* 140, no. Supplement_2 (2017).

²Slonje Robert, "Cyberbullying: Another main type of bullying?." 147 *Scandinavian journal of psychology* 49, no. 2 (2008).

³*Ibid.*

⁴Graf Daniel, "Why did you do that? Differential types of aggression in offline and in cyberbullying" 107107*Computers in Human Behavior* 128 (2022).

⁵B. Davison Christopher and Carl H. Stein, "The dangers of cyberbullying" 595 *North American Journal of Psychology* 16, no. 3 (2014).

⁶JongSerl Chun and Lee Jungup, et.al., "An international systematic review of cyberbullying measurements" 106485 *Computers in human behaviour* 113 (2020).

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Herbert Scheithauer and Anja Schultze-Krumbholz, et.al., "Types of cyberbullying" 120 *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Bullying: A Comprehensive and International Review of Research and Intervention* 1 (2021).

¹⁰*Ibid.*

around them.¹¹ Victims may experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as a result of the abuse, and may even be driven to self-harm or suicide.¹² Friends and family members of victims may also be affected, as they struggle to provide support and cope with their own feelings of helplessness and anger.¹³ While there are many different factors that contribute to the problem of cyberbullying,¹⁴ there are also many steps that individuals and communities can take to prevent it.¹⁵ These include educating children and young adults about the risks and consequences¹⁶ of cyberbullying, encouraging victims to speak out and seek help, and creating safe spaces online where individuals can communicate without fear of harassment or abuse.¹⁷

II. Background:

The term "cyberbullying" first gained attention in the early 2000s as the internet became more widely used.¹⁸ However, the concept of using technology to bully or harass others has been around since the early days of online communication. In the 1980s and 1990s, bulletin board systems (BBS) were popular for online communication, and instances of cyberbullying were reported.¹⁹ In the early 2000s, with the rise of social media platforms like MySpace and Facebook, cyberbullying became more prevalent and visible.²⁰

As technology developed, so have cyberbullying contents? In a survey conducted in 2021 by the Pew Research Centre, a large minority of U.S. adults (41%) say they have personally

¹¹Slonje Robert and Peter K. Smith, et.al., "The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention" 26 *Computers in human behaviour* 29, no. 1 (2013).

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³BeltránCatalán and María, et.al., "Victimisation through bullying and cyberbullying: Emotional intelligence, severity of victimisation and technology use in different types of victims"12 *Psicothema* (2018).

¹⁴Aboujaoude Elias and Matthew W. Savage, et.al., "Cyberbullying: Review of an old problem gone viral." 11 *Journal of adolescent health* 57, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁵Shaikh Farhan Bashir and Mobashar Rehman, et.al., "Cyberbullying: A systematic literature review to identify the factors impelling university students towards cyberbullying" 148031 *IEEE Access* 8 (2020).

¹⁶Zhu Chengyan, and Shiqing Huang, et.al., "Cyberbullying among adolescents and children: A comprehensive review of the global situation, risk factors, and preventive measures" 634909 *Frontiers in public health* 9 (2021).

¹⁷Naruskov Karin and Piret Luik, et.al., "Estonian Students 'perception and Definition of Cyberbullying" 323 *Trames: A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 16, no. 4 (2012).

¹⁸W. Patchin Justin and Sameer Hinduja "Cyberbullying: An update and synthesis of the research" 13 *Cyberbullying prevention and response*, Routledge (2012).

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Oblad Timothy, "A holistic overview of cyberbullying across the world: review of theories and models" *Anxiety Disorders-The New Achievements* (2020).

experienced online harassment, with 25% reporting the more severe forms of harassment such as stalking, physical threats or sustained harassment. So, cyberbullying can be anything, starting from:²¹

- a) Social media harassment: This can include posting derogatory comments or photos on someone's social media profile or creating fake profiles to harass or bully someone.²²
- b) Text message harassment: This can include sending threatening or harassing messages to someone's phone.²³
- c) Email harassment: This can include sending threatening or harassing emails to someone's inbox.²⁴
- d) Online gaming harassment: This can include using online gaming platforms to bully or harass someone.²⁵
- e) Doxing: This refers to the practice of publishing someone's personal information, such as their home address or phone number, online with the intention of inciting harassment.²⁶

In India, cyberbullying has become a major concern due to the widespread use of the internet and social media. Historically, cyberbullying laws in India have been shaped by a number of landmark cases. One such case is the case of *R v. Zolfaghari*, which was decided in 2009.²⁷ In this case, the accused had sent harassing emails to his former girlfriend, causing her to fear for her safety. The court found the accused guilty of harassment and sentenced him to imprisonment. This case set an important precedent for the criminalization of cyberbullying in

²¹J. Meter Diana and Ross Budziszewski, et.al., "A qualitative exploration of college students' perceptions of cyberbullying" 467 *TechTrends* 65 (2021).

²²Whittaker Elizabeth and Robin M. Kowalski, "Cyberbullying via social media" 11-29 *Journal of school violence* 14, no. 1 (2015).

²³Ali Wan Noor Hamiza Wan and Masnizah Mohd, et.al., "Cyberbullying detection: an overview." 3 In 2018 *Cyber Resilience Conference (CRC)IEEE*, (2018).

²⁴Englander Elizabeth, "Cyberbullying and Sexual Harassment: Bullying and Harassment in a Digital World" *Family & Intimate Partner Violence Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2021).

²⁵Huang Jinyu and Zhaohao Zhong, et.al., "Cyberbullying in social media and online games among Chinese college students and its associated factors" 4819 *International journal of environmental research and public health* 18, no. 9 (2021).

²⁶Jacqueline Garrick and Martina Buc, "Doxxing." In *The Psychosocial Impacts of Whistleblower Retaliation: Shattering Employee Resilience and the Workplace Promise*, pp. 153-163. Cham: Springer International Publishing, (2022).

²⁷ *R v. Zolfaghari* [2018] ONCA 5

India. The other landmark case is *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, decided in 2015. For instance, A case in point of this would be the apex court of India quashing down sec 66A of the Information Technology Act,²⁸ which was called out universally for its abuse with respect to online harassment and cyberbullying. SC ruled the section as unconstitutional and violative of right to freedom of speech and expression.²⁹ In recent years, there have been several high-profile cases of cyberbullying in India. One such case is the case of Aruna Reddy, a gymnast who was targeted by online trolls after she failed to perform well in a competition. Another case is the case of Jhanvi Kukreja, a college student who was allegedly murdered by two of her classmates after a dispute that began with cyberbullying. To address the issue of cyberbullying in India, the government has enacted a number of laws and regulations. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, for example, require social media platforms to remove content that is considered to be offensive, defamatory, or threatening within 36 hours of receiving a complaint. The government has also launched a national cybercrime reporting portal to allow citizens to report incidents of cyberbullying and other online crimes.³⁰

III. Research Objectives:

1. To identify the prevalence of cyberbullying among students in rural areas of Hamirpur.
2. To explore the types of cyberbullying experienced by students in rural areas.
3. To examine the impact of cyberbullying on the psychological well-being of students in rural areas.
4. To assess the level of awareness among students in rural areas of Hamirpur about cyberbullying and its consequences.
5. To suggest measures for preventing and addressing cyberbullying in rural areas of Hamirpur, based on the findings of the study.

²⁸ Section 66A, Information Technology Act 2000, India, *available at*: <http://www.mit.gov.in/it-bill.asp> (Last Modified March 19, 2025).

²⁹ Anshika Bhadauria, "Shreya Singhal v/s Union of India (2013) 12 SCC 73" 55 *Supremo Amicus* 9 (2019).

³⁰ Moksha Sharma and Keerti Pendyal, "Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021-Protection from Malicious Content or Chilling Free Speech" *Available at SSRN* 3967857 (2021).

IV. Research Methodology:

With cybercrimes like cyber bullying becoming a growing concern for the country of India and its states, such as Himachal Pradesh, this is something that needs to be dealt with. Such crimes are proving to be increasingly impactful, creating the cause for action taken. Keeping this in view, the current study was conducted in some villages of the district Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh. The empirical study was conducted in Hamirpur District of Himachal Pradesh, and *Block Bhoranj*, which includes backward panchayats, was selected for it. Primary data collection process using specially designed questionnaire for studying objectives and for secondary data collection document, reports, media sources and internet search. There are no opinionated insights in this report, and it is purely descriptive and exploratory.

V. Literature review

Cyberbullying has become a widespread problem among students, with studies reporting varying rates of prevalence depending on the sample and methodology used(Hinduja and Patchin 2018) For example, a survey of 10,700 students aged 12 to 17 in the United States found that 34% had experienced cyberbullying at least once in their lifetime.³¹ Similarly, a study of 5,700 Canadian students aged 11 to 18 found that 23% had experienced cyberbullying in the past year (Van Geel et.al., 2014). Another study of 3,500 European students aged 11 to 16 found that 12% had experienced cyberbullying in the past two months.³²

Cyberbullying can have a range of negative consequences for students, including psychological, emotional, and social harm. For example, a study of 4,000 Australian students aged 8 to 14 found that cyberbullying was associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Cross et.al., 2015).³³ Another study of 1,800 students in the United Kingdom found that cyberbullying was associated with lower academic achievement and attendance (Kowalski et.al., 2014).³⁴ Additionally, cyberbullying can also have lasting effects

³¹Sameer Hinduja and W. Justin Patchin, "Cyberbullying research summary: Cyberbullying and suicide" *available at: http://www.cyberbullying.us/myspace_youth_research.pdf* (2018) (Last modified, March 10, 2025).

³²Li Qing and Peter K. Smith, et.al., "Research into cyberbullying." *1-12 Cyberbullying in the global playground: Research from international perspectives* (2012).

³³Cross Donna and Amy Barnes, et.al., "A social-ecological framework for understanding and reducing cyberbullying behaviours" *110 Aggression and Violent Behavior* 23 (2015).

³⁴M. Robin Kowalski and Gary W. Giamatti, et.al., Amber "Bullying in the digital age: a critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth" *1073 Psychological bulletin* 140, no. 4 (2014).

on students' mental health, with studies showing that it can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bauman et.al., 2013).³⁵

Several Teacher Factors Cyberbullying among students Specification like age, gender & online behaviour etc. Each research indicates that girls are over represented as victims of cyberbullying but boys are over represented as perpetrators (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).³⁶ It also found that students who riskily interacted with personal data over the internet (for example, their email or phone number), or who interacted with a stranger, were more likely to be subject to cyberbullying. Which has other risk factors such as low self-esteem, poor mental health, and lack of parental supervision (Kowalski et al., 2014).³⁷

Various strategies have been proposed for preventing and intervening in cyberbullying among students. These include school-based programs, parental involvement, and technology-based solutions. For example, school-based programs that focus on promoting positive behavior and improving social skills have been found to be effective in reducing cyberbullying.³⁸ Additionally, involving parents in prevention efforts and providing them with resources and support can also be helpful (Willard, 2007).³⁹ Finally, technology-based solutions, such as blocking and reporting features on social media platforms, can also be effective in preventing and addressing cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2014).⁴⁰

Prevalence and Pattern of Cyberbullying among School Students in India" (S. S. Kumar and A. Kumar 2017) This study aimed to investigate the prevalence and pattern of cyberbullying among school students in India. The authors conducted a survey of 650 students from various schools across the country. The results showed that 35% of the students reported experiencing

³⁵Sheri Bauman and B. Russell Toomey, et.al., "Associations among bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide in high school students" 341 *Journal of adolescence* 36, no. 2 (2013).

³⁶ *Supra note* 31.

³⁷ *Supra note* 34.

³⁸Izabela Zych and P. David Farrington, et.al., "Protective factors against bullying and cyberbullying: A systematic review of meta-analyses" 5 *Aggression and violent behaviour* 45 (2019).

³⁹Nancy Willard, *Cyberbullying and cyberthreats: Responding to the challenge of online social aggression, threats, and distress*. Research press, 2007.

⁴⁰ *Supra note* 34.

cyberbullying, with verbal abuse being the most common form. The study also found that boys were more likely to be cyberbullied than girls.⁴¹

"Cyberbullying and its Impact on Students: A Study in Indian Context" (S. R. Mohanty and M. S. Patnaik 2018) This study aimed to explore the impact of cyberbullying on students in India. The authors conducted a survey of 400 students from different universities in the country. The results showed that 31% of the students reported experiencing cyberbullying, with social media platforms being the most common medium. The study also found that cyberbullying had a significant negative impact on students' mental health, self-esteem, and academic performance.⁴²

"Cyberbullying in India: A Sociological Study" (V. K. Bhatia 2019) This book provides a comprehensive analysis of cyberbullying in India from a sociological perspective. The author explores the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to cyberbullying in the country. The book also examines the legal and policy frameworks related to cyberbullying and argues for a more proactive approach to addressing this issue.⁴³

"Cyberbullying in India: A Review of Current Research" (The Centre for Internet and Society 2018) This report provides a review of current research on cyberbullying in India. The authors analyze the prevalence, forms, and impacts of cyberbullying in the country. The report also discusses the legal and policy frameworks related to cyberbullying and provides recommendations for addressing this issue.⁴⁴

Cyberbullying is a growing concern in schools, as it can have serious negative effects on students' mental health, academic performance, and social well-being. A literature review of research on cyberbullying against students reveals several key findings.

⁴¹Sunil Kumar and A. Kumar, "Prevalence and pattern of cyberbullying among school students in India" 649 *Journal of School Health*, 87(9) (2017).

⁴²S. R. Mohanty and M. S. Patnaik, "Cyberbullying and its impact on students: A study in Indian context" 166 *International Journal of Scientific Research and Review*, 7(4) (2018).

⁴³V.K. Bhatia "Cyberbullying in India: A Sociological Study" 950 *Journal of Youth Studies* 22, no. 7 (2019)

⁴⁴Centre for Internet and Society. 2018. "Cyberbullying in India: A Review of Current Research." Available at: <http://cis-india.org/digital-society/cyberbullying-in-india-a-review-of-current-research> (Last Modified March, 13, 2025).

First, cyberbullying is a pervasive problem that affects a significant proportion of students. According to a survey conducted by the National Centre for Education Statistics, approximately 15% of students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported being cyberbullied during the 2018-2019 school year.

Second, cyberbullying is associated with a range of negative outcomes for students. Studies have shown that cyberbullying victims are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. They may also have lower self-esteem, poorer academic performance, and increased absenteeism.

Third, the impact of cyberbullying on students may be exacerbated by factors such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. For example, LGBTQ+ students are at a higher risk of experiencing cyberbullying than their heterosexual peers. Similarly, female students may be more likely to experience cyberbullying than male students.

Fourth, schools can play an important role in preventing and addressing cyberbullying. Research has shown that school-based interventions, such as education programs and policies that prohibit cyberbullying, can be effective in reducing the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying.

VI. Data analysis

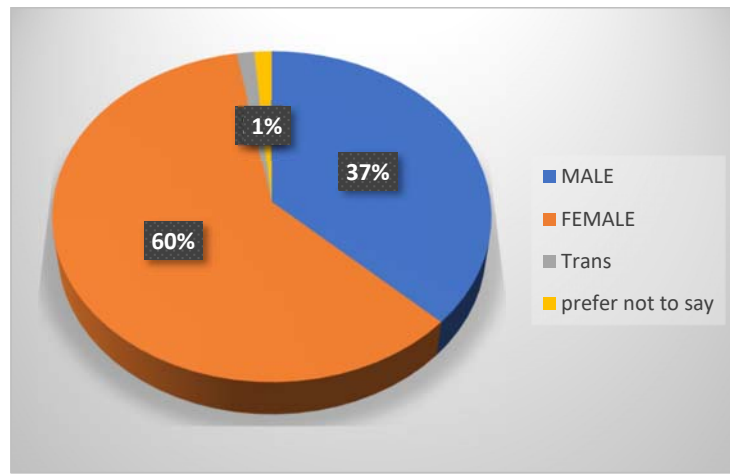
Data analysis has been divided into two:

A. Demographic details

B. Social perception

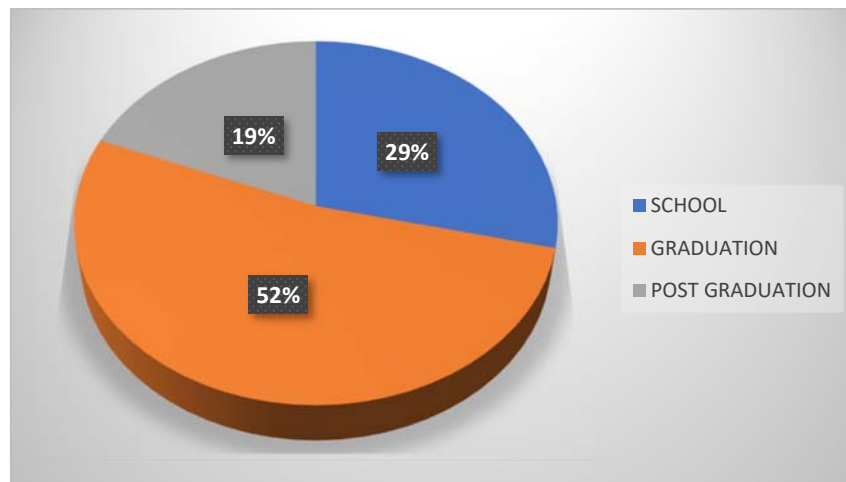
A. Demographic details:

The data has been collected from the students of senior secondary school and post graduate and under graduate students by the way of random sampling. The data has been collected from 143 students from rural regions. Out of 143 respondents 37 per cent are males, 60 percent are females and 1 per cent is transgender.



(Diagram 1 depicts the gender status of respondents)

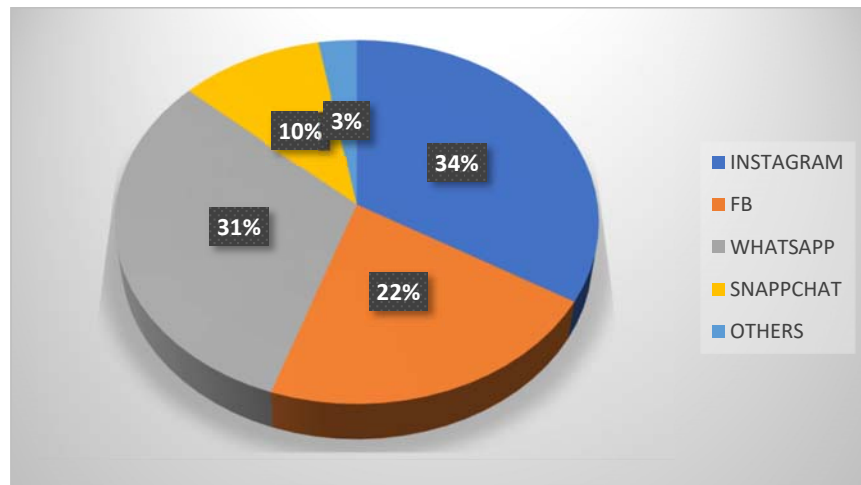
The respondents represent the different level of education. Out of 143 respondents around 29 per cent belongs to school level, 52 per cent responds belong to graduation level and 19 per cent belong to post graduation level.



(Diagram 2 shows the educational level of respondents)

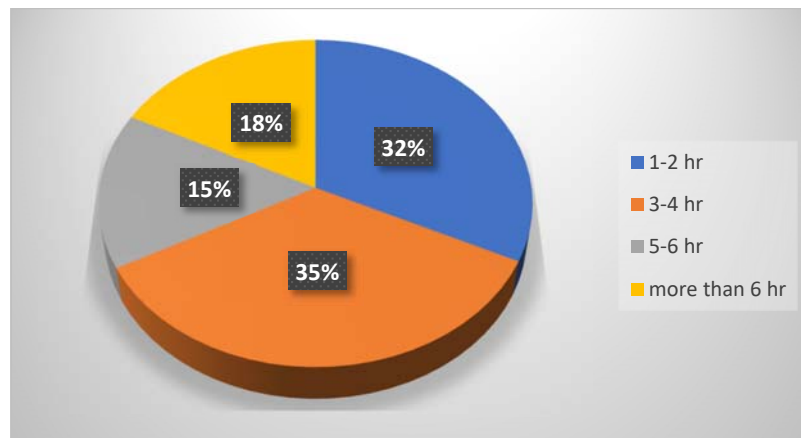
B. Analysis of Social perception

1. The respondents were being asked the most preferred social media platform used by them. The majority of respondents with 34 per cent preferred to use Instagram as social media platform, 31 per cent WhatsApp, 22 per cent for Facebook, 10 per cent with snapchat and 3 per cent prefer other social media platforms like tinder, twitter, wechat etc.



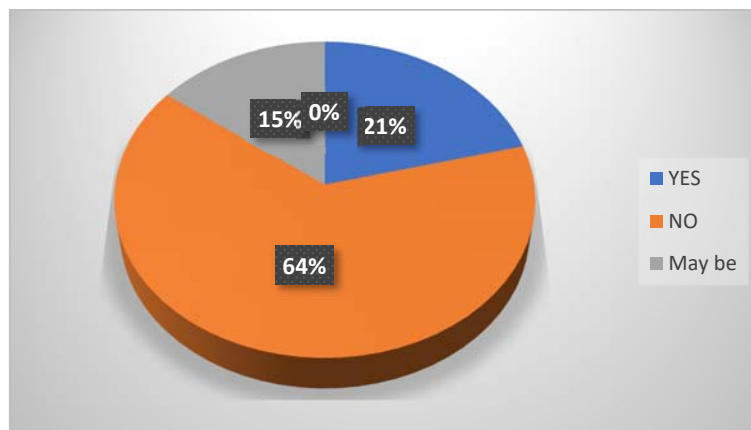
(Diagram 3 depicts the social media platform preference of respondents)

- The duration of internet use in a day has been gathered to know the relation between cyber bullying and frequent internet user. The majority of respondents with 35 per cent spend 3-4 hours on internet, followed by 32 per cent who spend 1-2 hours on internet, 18 per cent 5-6 hours in a day and 15 per cent of respondents spend more than 6 hours in a day on internet.



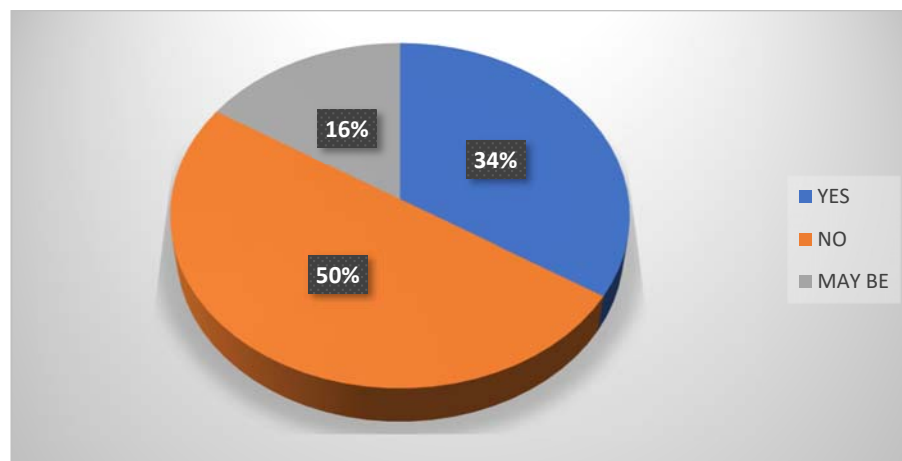
(Diagram 4 depicts use of Internet duration in a day)

3. The respondents were asked whether they have ever faced cyber bullying in their lives. The majority of respondents with 64 per cent says no meaning thereby they never faced anything like cyberbullying while 21 per cent respondents say yes and 15 per cent may be.



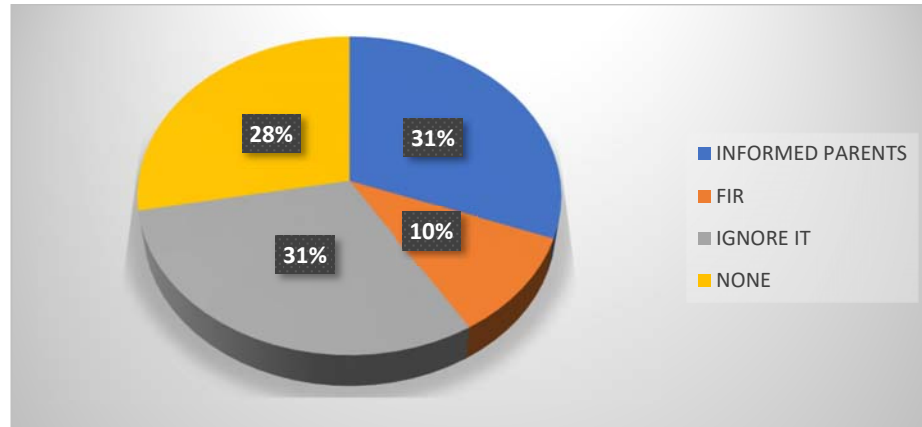
(Diagram 5 shows the counter of respondents with cyberbullying)

4. The respondents were asked whether they know any victim of cyberbullying in their friend circle, relatives or any person known to them. The majority of respondents with 50 per cent denied to know any victim of cyberbullying, 34 per cent affirmed knowing the victim of cyberbullying while 16 per cent go with may be.



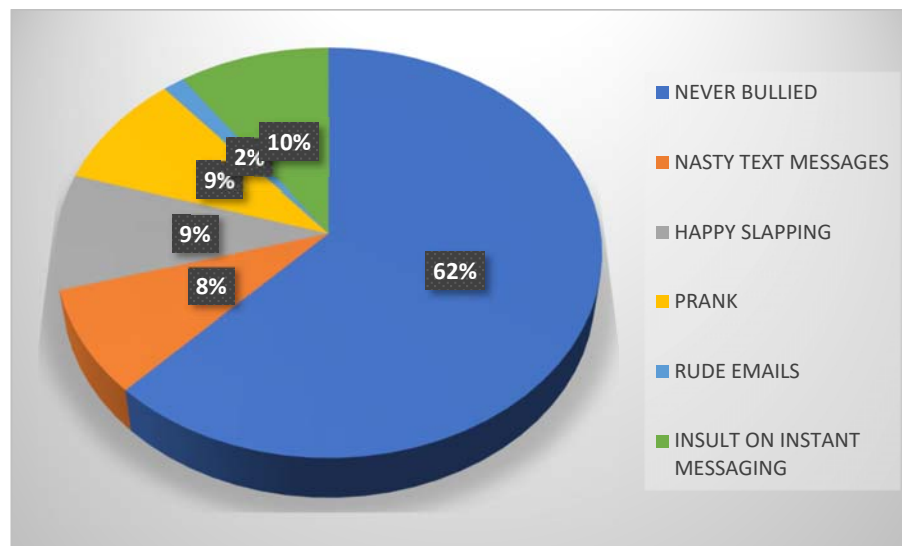
(Diagram 6 depicts knowing the victim of cyberbullying by respondent)

5. To know the awareness about the legal safeguards, the respondents were asked what step they took after witnessing cyberbullying. Ironically informing parents and ignoring the situation received equal response with 31 per cent each. Only 10 per cent respondents actually report the matter with police. 28 per cent respondents go with none.



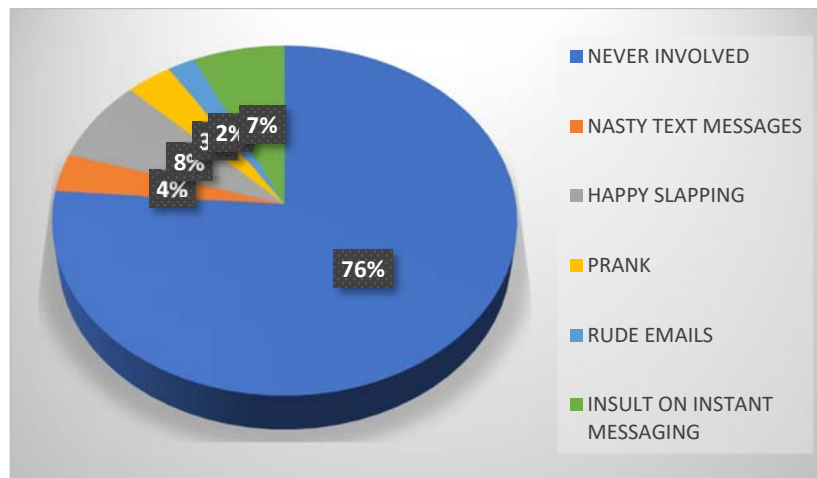
(Diagram 7 deals with the step taken by the victims of cyber bullying)

6. The respondents were asked about the type of cyberbullying they ever faced. 62 per cent says they never faced any type of bullying. 10 per cent of all faced insult on instant messaging, 9 per cent of total respondents faced cyber bullying in the form of happy slap and prank each, 8 percent faced it in the form of nasty text message and 2 percent in the form of rude email messages.



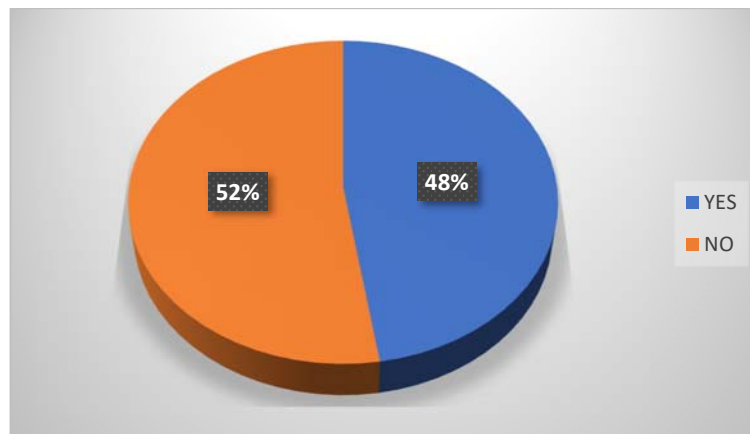
(Diagram 8 depicts the form of cyberbullying faced)

7. The respondents were asked whether they have ever indulged or committed any kind of cyber bullying like prank, rude emails, happy slapping etc. 76 per cent respondents were never involved in any form of cyber bullying, 8 per cent in happy slapping, 7 per cent in insult on instant messaging, 4 per cent in nasty text messages, 3 per cent in prank and 2 per cent in rude emails.



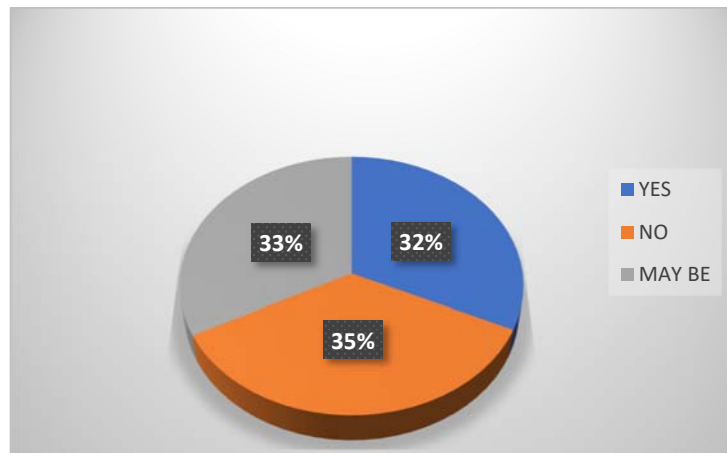
(Diagram 9 depicts the involvement of respondents in cyber bullying)

8. The respondents were asked whether they have attended any awareness program on cyberbullying. Most of the respondents with 52 per cent never attended any awareness program while 48 per cent attended such awareness program.



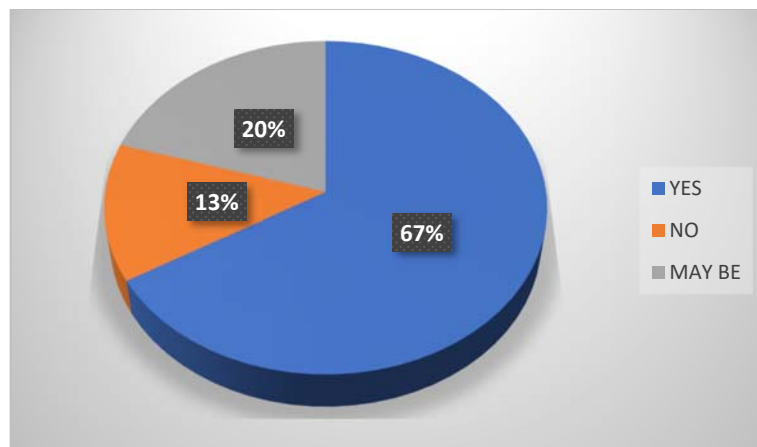
(Diagram 10 shows the awareness against cyberbullying)

9. Banning mobile phones in the educational will help in reducing cyberbullying cases. 32 per cent respondents agree with fact while 35 disagree. 33 percent are not sure about this.



(Diagram 11 shows the social perception about banning mobile phone in institutions)

10. The last question deals with the effect of cyber bullying on victim. Cyber bullying results in low self-confidence and will power. The majority respondents agree with the fact that cyber bullying results in low self-confidence and will power while 13 says no and 20 per cent says may be.



(Diagram 12 depicts the social perception on effect of cyberbullying)

VII. Finding & Conclusion

The study reveals that students, the young generation belonging to geographically backward area is well acquainted with the use of information technology and has account in most of the social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc. students spend sufficient time of such social media platforms in a day. It is surprising that even in such a backward area around 212 per cent the students have been victim of cyberbullying one point of time or other. We can well imagine the situation in towns and urban areas. However, there is lack of legal awareness on the part of students. If any such incidence happens to them or in their nearby circle, they usually ignore the instance or share with their parents, instead of reporting the incidence to State authorities. Only a very few students have ever attended any awareness program against cyberbullying. On the contrary to victimization, a very few students involved or ever committed cyberbullying. Majority students agree that the incidents like cyberbullying impair the confidence level among victims. Therefore, the fact cannot be denied that cyberbullying is on rise even in small towns and villages and there is an urgent need to make students aware of cyberbullying and ways to tackle with it. for this following are some of the suggestions:

- i.** Increase awareness and education: It is crucial to educate students and their parents about the dangers of cyberbullying and its harmful effects. Schools can provide awareness-raising initiatives that include workshops, presentations, and informational materials.
- ii.** Promote responsible online behaviour: Students need to be taught how to use technology and social media platforms responsibly. This includes teaching them about the importance of privacy settings, appropriate online behaviour, and the consequences of cyberbullying.
- iii.** Encourage reporting: Schools should establish clear reporting procedures for students who experience cyberbullying. Students should feel comfortable reporting incidents of cyberbullying to their teachers or school authorities without fear of retaliation.
- iv.** Provide support: Victims of cyberbullying require emotional support, and schools should provide counselling and other resources to help them cope with the trauma.
- v.** Involve parents: Parents play a crucial role in preventing cyberbullying, and schools should involve them in awareness-raising initiatives and reporting procedures. Schools can provide parents with resources and tips for monitoring their children's online behaviour.