Adolescent Mental Health and Online Safety by Dr. Damanjit Sandhu QA1

Based on a study published in TIC Kids Online 2015 by Sandhu et. al., entitled "Digital uses, risk-taking and online negative experiences among recording school students in France and India. A comparative study.", it has revealed from a sample of 1021 Indian adolescents (14-18 years old) and 1312 French adolescents (13-18 years old), that India had generally more active online users and suffered more negative online experiences compared to France. The study involved an English self-report questionnaire adapted from Smith et al. (2008), Livingstone et al. (2011), and Blaya (2003).

The research has also suggested that the more time spent in online activity, the higher chances that the individual is trapped to some risky behavior that can possibly lead to cyberbullying occurences, either the individual will become bully or the other way around. Other major findings suggest that there is a direct relationship between the time spent on the Internet by young kids and the number of problematic incidents thet get into. It revealed that Indian adolescents are more prone to risk-taking behaviors on the Internet such as meeting strangers online, sharing personal information, publicizing their profiles, pretending to be a different person, etc. Indian adolescents also had more levels of online negative experiences such as receiving nasty messages and being excluded from online groups which is also considered a form of cyberbullying.

Published in International Journal of Social Sciences Review, a 2017 study was conducted aiming to examine the cyberbullying behavior among secondary school students in India. With a sample of 357 students, more than half (52%) turned out to be victims of cyberbullying, predominantly on social networking sites. Of that 52%, 12% knew their perpetrators' identities while the rest had no idea who were bullying them. Thus an issue of anonymity gains significance. Only 42% of the victims reported the incidents to their parents while 90% of those parents had no idea what to do. These are serious issues of parent-child relationships especially with cyberbullying incidents.

From another sample of 335 students in a 2017 study that examined the cyberbullying victimization on the self-esteem and academic achievements of adolescents, it suggested that children who have been cybervictimized have very low levels of self-esteem and poor academic performances. It also revealed that most of the cyberbullying incidents mainly focused on attacking or bodyshaming the physical features of the victims.

In a differnt study conducted in 2015, it revealed from a sample of 489 students rangung from 15 to 17 years of age, that cyber bullies had poor relationships with their parents and peers. They seemed to lack healthy and open communication with their parents. This is one are a of research intervention that we need to look at when handling and making strategies of online safety.

With all these alarming facts concerning online safety, what can be done by psychologists? Firstly, there is a need to develop and disseminate advocacy and jnformation resources to education institutions. Most schools are not prepared and educated when handling cases of cyberbullying. Teachers and other school staff especially councillors must be trained to handling such incidents. Second, school-based interventions must be designed that aims to prepare school staff to mediate the impacts of cyberbullying. Online safety should and must be introduced to all school curriculums and programs. Lastly, there should be further researches on the effectiveness of intervention programs for handling cases of cybervictimization.

In these times and the times to come, technology will continue to improve and expand as well as problems along with it will continue to arise and grow. Needless to say, online safety should be an advocacy to each and everyone living in this modern world of ours.