

Online Harassment and Cyberbullying Victimization and Its Emotional Impacts among Female Nursing and Non-Nursing Students

Hanan Elzeblawy Hassan^{1,*}, Eman Ali Abd El Moaty Sheha²,
Wafaa Mostafa Ahmed Gamel³, Ahmed Emad Eldin Arafa⁴

¹Maternal and Newborn Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Beni-Suef University, Egypt

²Lecturer of Community Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing-Fayoum University, Egypt

³Lecturer of Maternal and Neonatal Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Fayoum University, Egypt

⁴Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Beni-Suef University, Egypt

*Corresponding author: nona_nano_1712@yahoo.com

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Abstract Background: The increasing internet utilization is associated with various disadvantages. Online cyberbullying and harassment victimization is one of these disadvantages that pose negative emotional consequences. **Aim:** This study aimed to detect the prevalence of online cyberbullying and harassment victimization amongst nursing students from El-Fayoum University in comparison to students from other faculties at the same university. In addition to figuring out the most significant correlates of victimization and its emotional consequences. **Subjects and methods:** A total of 308 female nursing students and 320 female non-nursing students from El-Fayoum University participated in this cross-sectional survey. For data collection, a self-administered questionnaire was designed and distributed. The questionnaire included 3 sections; personal characters of the included students, online cyberbullying and harassment victimization during the past year, and the emotional consequences of victimization. **Results:** Of the surveyed female university students, 84 (27.3%) of the nursing students and 88 (27.5%) of the non-nursing students stated online harassment victimization during the past year, with no statistically significant differences between both groups ($P>0.05$). Almost two-thirds of the victimized students from nursing and non-nursing faculties reported online harassment, victimization more than once with no statistically significant differences between both groups ($P>0.05$). Urban residence and more hours of internet use per day did not correlate with the prevalence of online harassment victimization ($P>0.05$) but associated with frequent exposure ($P<0.05$). Anger (74.4%) was the most commonly reported emotional impact of online harassment victimization. Hatred, fear, sorrow, loneliness, and disappointment came next, however, with considerably lower rates. **Conclusion:** Female university students from nursing and non-nursing faculties were exposed to online cyberbullying and harassment victimization in recognizable rates. **Recommendations:** Further studies on the coping techniques to online harassment victimization should be conducted. Interventional programs to increase awareness regarding the windows of interference against online harassment according to the Egyptian Penal Code to reduce such intrusions and minimize their emotional effects should be considered.

Keywords: online harassment, cyberbullying, victimization, nursing students, young females

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1. Introduction

Internet utilization carries many pros and cons. On the one hand, it made the communications easier and faster, provided further ways of accessing information and improved the educational aspects. On the other hand, the internet led to concerns around data security and put users in a state of continuous danger because of the online crimes such as online harassment and Cyberbullying. [1,2,3]

Online harassment refers to harassment that occurs throughout different web mediums such as chat groups, e-mails, online texts, social website applications, viruses, and spams. Cyberbullying is an intentional aggression through electronic routes, such as text messages, e-mails, chat rooms, online games, and social websites. This harassment/cyberbullying is a non-physical act that targets females in the first place. But, the effects of this non-physical act will produce the same level of psychological disturbances for victims as physical one. [4] It has many types and could be of sexual or aggressive nature. [5]

The most common forms of aggression are direct aggression as physical, verbal and indirect as social isolation, rumors, and relational aggression, and they often require humiliating elements. [6] Physical aggression contains kicking, hitting, punching, shoving. [7] Verbal aggression requires insults, teasing, taunting and name-calling. [8] Indirect aggression is an attack on another person. [9] Relational aggression requires damaging another someone peer relationship with the goal of damaging their self-esteem and social status by spreading of rumors. [8] The goal of online harassment is to cause physical and emotional harm to another person. [10]

Numerous subtypes of cyberbullying have been reported including, "flaming" which is intense/hostile argument that regularly includes insulting, "outing" that includes exposure of sensitive/secrets material, "denigration & mockery" which involves using hurtful statements to put down the victim, "harassment" that involves unsolicited communications or interactions, "threatening/intimidation" as well as "exclusion" by singling out from online groups and/or chat rooms. [11]

Online harassment is not easy to be tracked because intruders are anonymous and hide behind the screen and victims do not usually report exposure to online harassment as a result of several social complexes in addition to the naive regulations in developing countries that need to be checked. [12,13,14] Victimization to harassment has many negative emotional consequences ranging from anger, fear, lack of concentration, sorrow, emotional distress, loneliness, poor academic achievement, education compromised, and absenteeism up to somatic disorders such as depression and suicidal ideation and commit suicide. It undermines the lifestyle, affects the work life, and disturbs the social relationships. [15,16,17,18] Females are more likely to be on the receiving end of online harassment than they are with traditional face-to-face abuse. [19,20] Some of the differences between face-to-face abuse and online harassment serve to aggravation the impacts of the online harassment on the victims. The length of exposure to online harassment text or images, for example, can place the victim in harm's way for longer durations of time compared to face-to-face harassment. [19] Additionally, some suggest that the impact of online harassment requiring new technology can be worse because can post, comment or create photos or videos that are available to widespread individuals. [21] Moreover, the aggression can reach targets anywhere place and at any time. [22] Also, Online harassment can be more visible and permanent. [23]

Lastly, online harassment is one of the most common problems between international and Arab communities. But it is religiously and ethically forbidden. Moreover, it is a crime punishable by international and domestic law. It is necessary to start raising the awareness of the Arab society in general and in Egypt, especially in closed areas as in rural descript and upper Egypt, with respect to the articles of the Egyptian Penal Code that help the family to preserve their rights and the right of all family members to these crime States. Article number 306 bis (a) provides that, the accused shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of ≥ 6 months and with a financial fine of 3000-5000 pounds. One of these two penalties shall be

punished together for anyone who exposed to others in a public/private place or stunned by making things/suggestions or sexual or pornographic remarks, by any means, including telecommunications or wireless means. Sexual insults are hints or pornographic whether by hint, word or act or by any means, including telecommunications and wireless. In the case of return, the penalty shall be doubled with imprisonment and financial fine in their lower and maximum limits. Additionally, Article number 306 bis (b) states; The penalty shall be imprisonment for a period of \geq one year and a fine of 5000-1000 pounds or one of these penalties if repeated act of the perpetrator through the prosecution and tracking of the offender. Moreover, in the case of repetition, the sentences of imprisonment and fines shall be doubled in their lower and maximum limits. [24]

1.1. Significant of the Study

Although online harassment has been recorded previously in many developed nations, little is known about the prevalence of this problem amongst young females in Egypt and the emotional impacts of this experience. Since a third of the Egyptian population uses the internet and half of them are young, [25,26] online harassments might be a prevalent problem. Further, little is known about the rates of online harassment victimization amongst young females because of the conservative nature of the community in Egypt generally and Fayoum especially. Meanwhile, determining the magnitude of the problem and its impacts could help in making regulations and laws that limit online harassment and punish the harassers. It could also help in establishing programs that help young females cope with the emotional consequences of online harassment victimization.

1.2. Operational Definitions

Harassment, from the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, refers to behavior towards someone that is threatening or that annoys or upsets them. In law, harassment refers to illegal behavior towards a person that causes mental/emotional suffering, which includes repeated unwanted contacts without a reasonable purpose, insults/threats/touching, or offensive language. [27]

Definition of "Cyberbullying" from the Cambridge Academic English Dictionary refers to the activity of using the internet to harm or frighten another person, especially by sending them unpleasant messages. [27]

Emotion is defined as a strong feeling such as love or anger or expressing strong feelings in general. [27]

1.3. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the prevalence of online cyberbullying/harassment victimization among nursing and non-nursing faculty female students from Fayoum University during the previous year and figure out the correlates with online cyberbullying/harassment.

1.4. Research Questions

- What is the prevalence of online cyberbullying/harassment victimization among

nursing and non-nursing faculty female students from Fayoum University during the previous year?

- What about the psychological impacts of cyberbullying/harassment on participating students?

2. Subjects and Methods

2.1. Study Design

A cross-sectional/descriptive design was adopted to survey female nursing students from Fayoum University while age-matched non-nursing students from the same university served as controls.

2.2. Setting

Students from Faculty of Nursing, Fayoum University and students affiliated to all other faculties of Fayoum University.

2.3. Period

The study was carried out throughout the 2nd semester of the academic year 2017/2018.

2.4. Sampling

The sample size was calculated using Epi-Info version 7 Stat Calc, [Center for Disease Control (CDC), WHO], based on the following criteria; online harassment victimization rate of 25.0%, a confidence level of 95.0%, a margin of error of 5.0%, and a non-response rate of 25.0%. The least accepted sample size was 285 students for each group, however, we distributed more questionnaires to enhance the statistical power and avoid the unexpectedly high non-response rate. A multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted to include female students from the Nursing Faculty and all other faculties of Fayoum University in a way that could represent all scholastic years.

2.5. Data Collecting Tool

A self-administrated questionnaire, comprised of 3 sections, was designed and distributed. **Section 1** included questions about the age and residence of students in addition to the average daily hours of internet use. **Section 2** included questions about online cyberbullying/harassment victimization during the past year and the frequency of victimization. **Section 3** assessed the emotional consequences of online cyberbullying/harassment victimization.

A pilot study on 10% of the students was conducted and the Cronbach's alpha for reliability was 0.77 and the content validity was judged by a professor of public health, 2 professors of maternity and newborn health nursing from

the faculty of Nursing, Beni-Suef and Fayoum University.

2.6. Data Management

Data were analyzed using the software, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Inc. Released 2009, PASW Statistics for Windows, version 18.0: SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA). Frequency distribution as a percentage and descriptive statistics in the form of mean and standard deviation (Mean \pm SD) were calculated. Chi-square (X^2), and t-test were done whenever needed. P values of less than 0.05 were considered significant. Column chart was used for graphic presentation.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The required approvals from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Fayoum University were obtained. The students were informed of the steps of the study with stressing on the confidentiality of their data.

3. Results

A total of 308 female nursing students with a mean age of 19.8 ± 1.6 years and 320 non-nursing students with a mean age of 19.8 ± 1.0 years participated in this study ($P > 0.05$). Almost a third of the nursing students were living in urban areas while two-thirds of the non-nursing students were residing in urban areas ($P < 0.05$). The duration of internet use per day amongst nursing and non-nursing students was 4.9 ± 3.8 hours and 6.5 ± 3.9 hours, respectively ($P < 0.05$) (Table 1).

Out of the investigated students, 27.3% of the nursing students and 27.5% of the non-nursing students reported online harassment victimization during their past year, with no statistically significant differences between both groups ($P > 0.05$) (Figure 1).

Out of the students who reported online harassment victimization, 33.3% of the nursing students and 31.8% of the non-nursing students reported online harassment victimization during the past year for once, while 66.7% of the nursing students and 68.2% of the non-nursing students reported online harassment victimization during the past year for more than once, with no statistically significant differences between both groups ($P > 0.05$) (Figure 2).

Age, residence, and internet use per day did not affect the prevalence of online harassment victimization ($P > 0.05$). However, students who were living in urban areas (Table 2) and those who reported spending more hours online daily were more likely to be victimized more than once ($P < 0.05$) (Table 3).

The emotional impacts of online harassment victimizations were mainly anger (74.4%), followed by hatred (15.1%), fear (12.8%), sorrow (12.2%), disappointment (11.6%), and loneliness (5.2%); (Table 4).

Table 1. Demographic characters of the participating nursing and non-nursing students

Characteristics	Nursing, n = 308 (%)	Non-Nursing, n = 320 (%)	P value
Age (Mean \pm SD)	19.8 ± 1.6	19.8 ± 1.0	0.601
Urban	113 (36.7)	216 (67.5)	< 0.001*
Rural	195 (63.3)	104 (32.5)	
Internet usage (Mean \pm SD) hours/day	4.9 ± 3.8	6.5 ± 3.9	< 0.001*

*p value is considered significant.

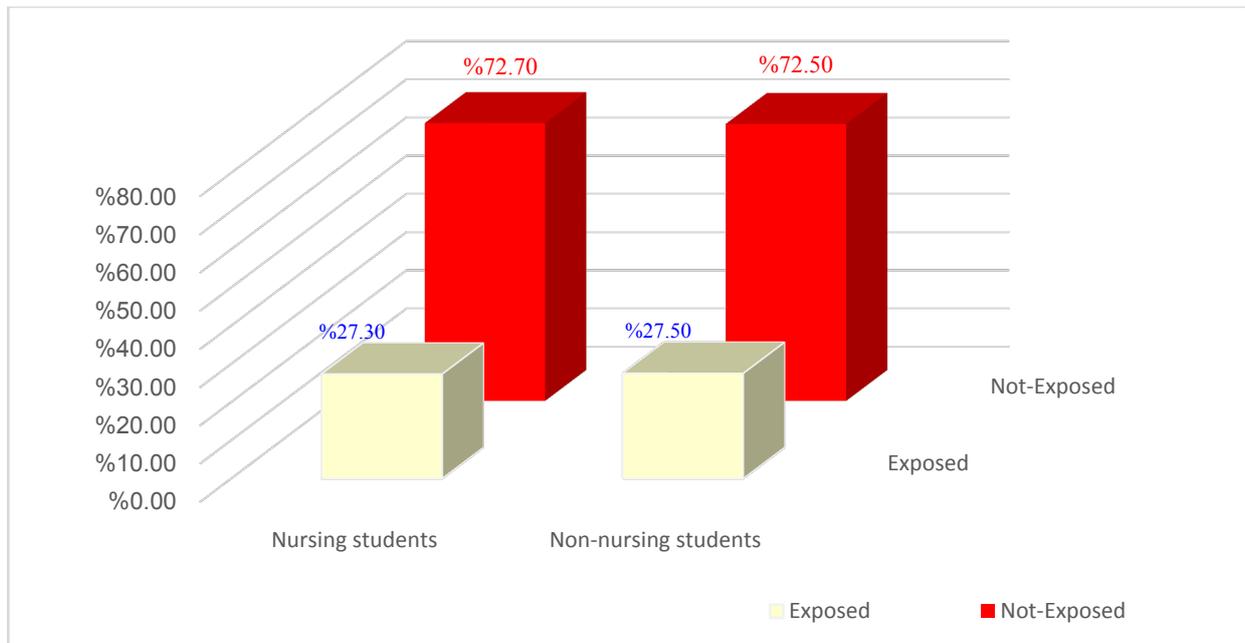


Figure 1. Prevalence of exposure to online harassment among the nursing and non-nursing students during their past year

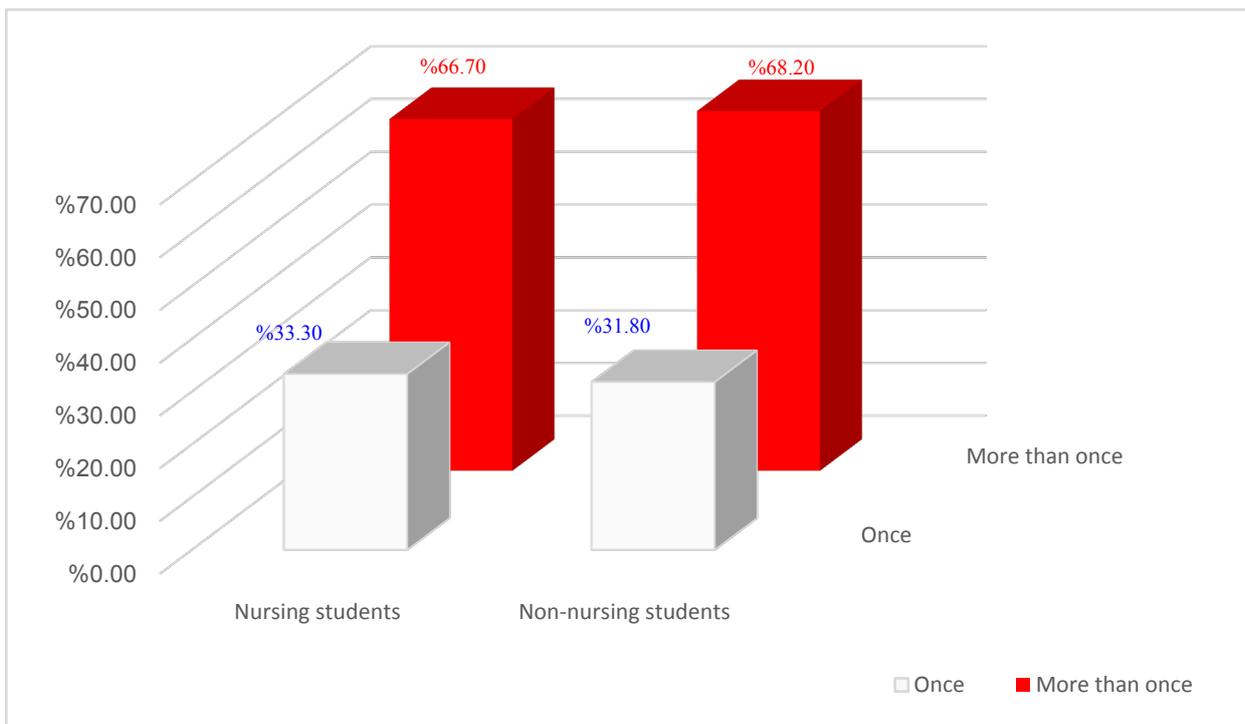


Figure 2. Frequency of exposure to online harassment among the victimized nursing and non-nursing students during the past year

Table 2. Factors associated with online harassment victimization among nursing and non-nursing students during the past year.

Characteristics		Exposed, n = 172 (%)	Not-Exposed, n = 456 (%)	P value
Age (Mean ± SD)		19.8 ± 1.4	19.7 ± 1.1	0.604
Residence	Urban	86 (50.0)	243 (53.3)	0.259
	Rural	86 (50.0)	213 (46.7)	
Internet usage (Mean ± SD) hours/day		5.7 ± 4.0	5.8 ± 3.9	0.720

Table 3. Factors associated with frequency of online harassment victimization among nursing and non-nursing students during the past year.

Characteristics		Once, n=56 (%)	More than once, n = 116 (%)	P value
Age (Mean ± SD)		19.8 ± 0.8	19.7 ± 1.2	0.650
Residence	Urban	20 (35.7)	66 (56.9)	0.007*
	Rural	36 (64.3)	50 (43.1)	
Internet usage (Mean ± SD) hours/day		5.4 ± 3.0	6.6 ± 5.3	0.047*

*p value is considered significant.

Table 4. Emotional impacts of online harassment victimization among nursing and non-nursing students during the past year

Emotional impacts #	N = 172 (%)	%
Anger	128	74.4
Hatred	26	15.1
Fear	22	12.8
Sorrow	20	12.2
Disappointment	9	11.6
Loneliness	128	5.2

#Students could choose more than 1 emotional impact.

4. Discussion

The availability, popularity/ubiquity of information as well as communication technology created a new opportunities for online harassment. [28] In Egypt, researchers reported that a large section of women has been harassed at least once in their lifetime. The Egyptian Government, international/non-governmental organizations have been working for several years on interventions and activities to combat sexual harassment. In Egypt, with the widespread distribution and using of the online social media; this new media became a better/easily accessible form of conveying combating sexual harassment messages. [29] The primary health care providers have been urged to take a more crucial and active roles in preventing the long-term health consequences associated with youth bullying. [30,31] Several online harassment prevention strategies have been suggested: (1) parental education can be the key to preventing online harassment, establishing clear rules and their implications. (2) Internet safety programs, Internet filters [32], and Anti-Bullying programs have had modest success with the average decrease in incidents being about 15%. [33] (3) Federal legislation to criminalize online harassment and incident technological reporting for preventing online harassment. [34] (4) Increase awareness toward online harassment. [35] (5) Increase students' observation. [36]

This study discusses the exposure of nursing and non-nursing university students at Fayoum University to online cyberbullying/harassment during their previous year. The results showed that a considerable rate (27.3% of the nursing students and 27.5% of the non-nursing students) reported online harassment victimization during their previous year, and almost two-thirds of them experienced victimization more than once. In agreement with our findings, previous researches reported online harassment affecting females of different ages. The rates ranged between 12.0% and 77.0%. [37-41] However, it is not easy to compare our results to previous findings due to many reasons. *Firstly*, there is a lack of a universal definition of harassment. *Secondly*, repetition and intention of harassment could be considered as a character of harassment in some reports while other studies did not. *Thirdly*, the duration of harassment recall varied widely among the studies.

According to a 2014 Pew Internet study, online harassment significantly impacts both men and women, albeit in different ways. Young women face several forms of harassment at higher rates than older women. [42] Generally, online cyberbullying/harassment that targets women cannot be separated from the status of violence

against women. Such violence has been recorded nationally [43,44] and internationally. [45,46] In Egypt, previous studies showed that most girls experienced harassment in Cairo and Alexandria, [47,48] despite the Egyptian law punishes harassers with fine and prison sentences as documented in Article 306 bis (a & b). [24,49] However, online harassment is just a new form of the street harassment and therefore its high prevalence should not be strange. Many cultural factors should be taken into consideration. For example, in conservative communities, victims tend to be blamed and they would not have any chance to report their victimization because of the associated stigma. [37,38]

This study did not show a significant relationship between age and online harassment victimization, but it should be noted that the range of the age of the participating students was restrictive. The frequency of online harassment victimization correlated with the urban residence which coincided with a previous study. [47] This is because urban communities are not closed, and harassers can run away with their intrusions unlike the rural closed communities where harassers could be detected and punished. [50,51] In addition, longer hours of internet use correlated with the frequency of online harassment victimization which agreed with previous studies. [46,52] However, it should be noted that we detected high daily hours of internet use which could be explained as a kind of internet addiction which consisted of a previous national study. [53]

In the current study, nursing students spent significantly fewer hours online compared to other students from different faculties. This could be explained by the fact that nursing students spend considerably more hours studying rather than surfing the social websites. Further, our results showed that nursing students were more likely to live in rural areas. This means that they spend more hours traveling to and from the faculty which could result in fewer hours using the internet.

Our results showed that the emotional impact of online cyberbullying/harassment victimization was mainly anger. This could explain the extreme negative psychological consequences of exposure to online harassment. Other consequences such as fear, hatred, loneliness, sorrow, and disappointment were also recorded. In agreement with our study, previous reports showed that the victimized girls reported anger, disappointment, sorrow, and depression. [17,54,55] Our results are in line with a study that investigated the impact of cyberstalking victimization on psychological trauma and impairment of academic/career functioning, the researcher found that cyberstalking victimization predicted psychological trauma and impairment in academic/career functioning. [56] Additionally, a cross-sectional study conducted on 455 female registered nurses who have worked in 3 government hospitals in Melaka, Malaysia found that the prevalence of sexual harassment, at workplace, among registered nurses was relatively high (51.2%). The study showed that 74.7% of those who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace stated that they suffered psychological disturbances. This means that harassment would give a negative impact on the nurses and would negatively impact the quality of their work. If this problem persists it would affect the image of hospitals involved. [57]

5. Conclusion

Online harassment during the past year was common among female university students from both nursing and non-nursing faculties in recognizable rates. These intrusions impacted negatively the psychological state of the participating students

6. Recommendations

- Programs that transfer awareness messages to students and their parents regarding the windows of interference against online harassment according to the Egyptian Penal Code. These intrusions should be faced seriously to minimize the emotional impacts of online harassment victimization and encourage more women to report exposure to harassment.
- Further studies on the coping techniques to online harassment victimization should be conducted to reduce such intrusions and minimize their emotional effects should be considered.

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