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### Safe Space: To Help Minimize Cyberbullying and Support Social Well-being

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# Safe Space: To Help Minimize Cyberbullying and Support Social Well-being

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**Abstract** - The perverseness of cyberbullying as a growing and serious form of abuse with the potential for harm among children and youth needs to be recognized. In a resource-limited setting such as South Asia where youth have very little access to counseling within schools, the implications for mental health should be recognized. This research study explores whether our youth is capable of using technology in the right way to minimize cyberbullying and support social well-being.

**Index Terms** - Cyberbullying, Social Well-being, User Experience Design, and Usability Study.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world which has been made smaller by technology, new age problems have been born. No doubt technology has a lot of benefits; however, it also comes with a negative side. It has given birth to cyberbullying. To put it simply, cyberbullying refers to the misuse of information technology with the intention to harass others. The exponential growth in the use of mobile phones and technological devices to access the Internet provides adolescents with many opportunities to communicate and access information but comes with the risk of cyberbullying.

While there appears to be a risk associated with befriending people online, the connections with traditional forms of bullying and the risks for cyberbullying from among their peers and their own social networks cannot be ignored. Therefore, this calls for greater parental awareness and supervision, on the one hand, there is also a need for capacity building among youth to be able to recognize, cope, and address various forms of bullying within their own peer groups, on the other hand.

Linguistically appropriate resources that are suitable to the local context may be needed to create awareness among youth and within schools to curb cyberbullying and mitigate the risks associated with it. Safe Space is such a resource that allows people to create and view discussion threads within a 5-mile radius and allows people to identify/track safety shelters around them. ("hidden burden of Cyberbullying")

This research study focuses on what is cyberbullying, the role of social media in increasing the risk of cyberbullying,

and its impact on the mental health of the youth. It also discusses the results of the informal usability study conducted to evaluate the usability of the app. Finally, we will talk about the future plans of the platform, Safe Space.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### I. What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior. ("Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it")

The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are, Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok. It can also occur via text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices, Instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the internet, online forums, chat rooms, and message boards, such as Reddit, email, and online gaming communities.

Cyberbullying can take on many forms, including personal attacks, harassment or discriminatory behavior, spreading defamatory information, misrepresenting oneself online, spreading private information, social exclusion, and cyberstalking.

Face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying can often happen alongside each other. But cyberbullying leaves a digital footprint – a record that can prove useful and provide evidence to help stop the abuse. ("What Is Cyberbullying")

### II. What role social media plays in cyberbullying?

As social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and others continue to grow in popularity, adolescents are spending more of their time online navigating a complex virtual world.

New research suggests that these increased hours spent online may be associated with cyberbullying behaviors. According to a study by the University of Georgia, higher social media addiction scores, more hours spent online and identifying as male significantly predicted cyberbullying perpetration in adolescents.

When adolescents are online, they adapt to a different set of social norms than when they're interacting with their peers in person. Oftentimes, they are more aggressive or critical on social media because of the anonymity they have online and their ability to avoid retaliation. Additionally, cyberbullies may feel less remorse or empathy when engaging in these behaviors because they can't see the direct impact of their actions.

Teenagers who are addicted to social media are more likely to engage in cyberbullying, as well as those who spend more time online. Participants in the study reported spending on average over seven hours online per day, and the reported average maximum hours spent online in one day was over 12 hours.

Social networking sites are designed to give people a dopamine hit, she added, and some people compulsively look for that hit. "It's feeding into that addictive behavior, and they may be using cyberbullying as a way to get likes, shares, comments and retweets," Amanda Giordano, principal investigator of the study and associate professor in the UGA Mary Frances Early College of Education said. "That's the common thread you see in behavioral addictions—people start relying on a rewarding behavior as a way to make them feel better when they're experiencing negative emotions. And so, I think the social media addiction piece is really interesting to show that there's another factor at play here in addition to the number of hours spent online." (Kao)

The study also found that adolescent males are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than females, aligning with past studies that show aggressive behaviors tend to be more male-driven. More research on the socialization process of men can help determine what's leading them to engage in more cyberbullying behaviors.

### *III. How does cyberbullying impact mental health?*

Cyberbullying is when someone intentionally tries to harm another person with increasing aggression by expressing mean and hurtful things via electronic devices. Such actions may snowball quickly on the internet and "go viral," further compounding the psychological stress felt by the person targeted by the bullying.

2020 research indicates that people who are targets of cyberbullies can be adversely affected physically and mentally. But many people who experience cyberbullying

may keep quiet out of embarrassment, fear, or shame. Cyberbullying in adults and children may lead to or increase the chances of depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, social isolation, substance use, and sadness.

Today's youth are particularly vulnerable. Many teens, even younger kids, spend endless hours connected to the internet with their phones, computers, or other digital devices. A 2019 Swedish study indicates that youths involved in cyberbullying, either as the target or the perpetrator, had a higher risk of symptoms of depression and anxiety. They also had lower levels of general well-being. A kid bullied on a playground might find a haven at home where they feel the protection of parents and family members.

It's different in cyberspace because bullying can live on, become persistent, and even permanent because it happens online, it may go unnoticed by responsible adults who might otherwise be able to step in and help.

Microsoft Corporation conducted a worldwide study on the phenomenon of online bullying with 7,644 youth aged eight to seventeen years in twenty-five countries (approximately 300 respondents per country), including six Asian nations. The researchers chose the term "online bullying" due to concerns that some might misunderstand the term "cyberbullying." Thirty-seven percent of participants reported negative experiences online, including being called mean names or teased; 58 percent were aware of online bullying; 54 percent reported being very or somewhat worried about online bullying. The study indicated that youth in the age range of thirteen to seventeen years were at a higher risk of being bullied, as well as being bullied online when compared to youth aged eight to twelve years. They were also more knowledgeable and worried about online bullying than the younger age group. ("Cyberbullying in Asia")

Of the 25 countries surveyed in the Microsoft study, the three countries in which participants reported the highest rates of online bullying were China (70 percent), Singapore (58 percent), and India (53 percent). Other Asian countries in the study reported the following percentages of online bullying: Malaysia, 33 percent; Pakistan, 26 percent; and Japan, 17 percent. The same three countries with the highest rates of online bullying also reported the highest rates of having bullied someone online: China, 58 percent; India, 50 percent; and Singapore, 46 percent. These statistics illuminate the great need for media literacy initiatives and for a holistic approach to addressing the issue through programming focused on students and school personnel, parents, and the wider community. The laws need to keep pace with the burgeoning use and abuse of ICT. There are multiple reasons why youth doesn't talk about cyberbullying such as they are worried about their devices being taken away, they don't view the online behavior as cyberbullying,

they don't know how to talk about it, the reason they are being bullied is very personal, they think they should be able to fix it on their own. ("Cyberbullying in Asia")

The guilt culture in South Asia prevents people from talking about the uncomfortable. Guilt culture forms when a society uses guilt to promote socially acceptable behaviors. The emotion of guilt is used as a tool to emphasize self-control, feeling indebted to certain people and circumstances, and staying within the boundaries of cultural norms. This does not have to occur on a large scale or societal level. It's also possible to live in a household or be in a relationship that relies on guilt to ensure obedience and conformity. A common example is being told that 'others' will not approve of your behavior and decisions. The thought of what will people say (i.e. *log kya kahenge?*). Eventually, everything comes down to the family's respect which stops so many victims from being vulnerable. (Ahmed)

Safe Space is an initiative that allows anyone to speak about the uncomfortable and that is one way of minimizing the risks of cyberbullying. It is an iOS app that allows people to create and view discussion threads within a 5-mile radius and allows people to identify/track safety shelters around them. It also allows the users to be anonymous or identifiable.

#### METHODOLOGY

Safe Space was designed on Figma by following the UX Design Principles mentioned below:

- Empathize, Define, and Ideate: Empathizing with users is the first phase of the design process that allowed us to think through the needs of your potential users to build empathy maps and create personas. These hands-on activities helped me understand user perspectives and pain points. This stage allowed us to empathize with users to understand their needs and pain points, create empathy maps, personas, user stories, and user journey maps to understand user needs, develop problem statements to define user needs, generate ideas for possible solutions to user problems, and conduct competitive audits.
- Build Wireframes and Low-Fidelity Prototypes: This stage focused on developing a goal statement, creating two types of storyboards: big picture and close-up, understanding the difference between low-fidelity and high-fidelity design, applying the principles of information architecture to organize a mobile app, creating paper wireframes for a mobile app design, developing digital wireframes in Figma, building paper prototypes to add interactivity to designs, designing a low-fidelity

prototype in Figma, and recognizing implicit bias and deceptive patterns in design.

- Design High-Fidelity Prototypes: The focus of this step was to create high-fidelity designs, called mockups in Figma. We applied common visual design elements and principles, demonstrated how to design systems can be used to organize, standardize, and enhance designs, and understood the role of design critique sessions and feedback while iterating on designs.

Lastly, informal unmoderated usability was conducted in order to test the concepts of the app designs. The prototypes were shared with some South Asian students at Connecticut College aged 19-22 years. They were asked to use the features of the app and give feedback on the designs. Later on, they were asked questions related to cyberbullying in their respective South Asian countries. Most of them said that they would be comfortable using the app and they think it is a great initiative to get victims to start talking about their stories and seek help from the people on the platform. They also said seeing other people share coming out with their stories could inspire so many victims and help them share their own. They also mentioned how staying anonymous would encourage more victims to speak in South Asia because the majority of the people cannot seek help from adults just because of how the society is. Some people were not sure if they would use the app in an emergency to track safety shelters around them because using an app in case of an emergency could be a hassle. Some people also pointed out how the designs don't portray anonymous posts on the home screen so they were concerned about clarity there.

#### CONCLUSION

The perverseness of cyberbullying as a growing and serious form of abuse with the potential for harm among children and youth needs to be recognized and talked about. In a resource-limited setting such as South Asia where youth have very little access to counseling not just in schools but generally, the implications for mental health should be recognized. Safe Space is such a platform that allows people to create and view discussion threads within a 5-mile radius and allows people to identify/track safety shelters around them. It is an initiative that allows anyone to speak about the uncomfortable.

In the future, we want to introduce community groups on Safe Space to have specific discussions in those groups. We also want to introduce privacy modes to keep the stories safe. Lastly, We want to conduct a moderated usability study for a maximum of 30 minutes per user. A survey at the start and end of the study will be given to the users and System Usability Scale to evaluate the usability of the app. These survey questions will be used as a quantitative method to

evaluate and get actionable insights on the usability of the app. Lastly, after developing and launching the app we want to test success of the app by measuring the number of sign-ups and the number of posts per month. Eventually, further measures will be taken accordingly.

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