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Towards a Socio-Psychological Abyss: (Algerian) Teens & the (Cyber)Bullying Threat

نحوهاوية سوسيو-نفسية: المراهقون (الجزائريون) وخطر التنمر (الإلكتروني)

Vers un abîme socio-psychologique : Les Adolescents (algériens) et la menace du (Cyber) harcèlement

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Introduction

Nowadays' societies are recognized for being the most advanced, yet the most corrupted. This corruption, however, remains a logical result considering the lack of individual and collective ethics. Bullying, being a performance of modern days ethical breakdown, is seen as the plague of today's world. In fact, this social lesion has always been part of people's struggles in the worldwide communities. Nevertheless, the harm it is causing to people in general, and to teenagers and children mainly, is increasing immensely, especially that it is coming to the twenty-first century's generation in multiple forms, traditional and modern. The former is usually linked to the physical and verbal types of violence being practiced over the bullied, while the latter refers to what is known as cyber-bullying. Hence, using in-depth data analysis of a number of scientific papers comprising statistics, examinations and surveys, this research lays definitions of the different shapes of bullying, identifying its scope as well as the reasons that led to its existence, highlighting the Algerian case, and explaining the outcome consequences resulting from it, especially at the psychological level. By the end, some solutions have been suggested for the bullied to recover, and for parents to help their children step out of this social plague.

1. Bullying: One Danger, Many Shapes!

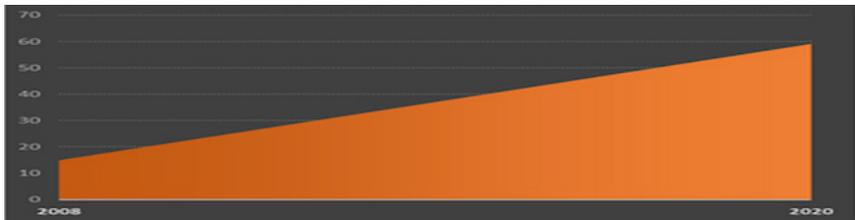
Among the different social issues that haunt our societies nowadays is bullying. This perilous problem came to today's world with different shapes, and more serious negative impacts. Still, the traditional forms of it impede the pacific co-existence of people. Nevertheless, its cyber type remains monstrous, due to both its invisibility and accessibility.

1.1 Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying is associated to, emotionally, physically, or psychologically, victimizing people, using internet and technological devices and platforms. “It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones” (*Cyberbullying*, n.d. para.3), and it can occur differently; through electronic messages (texts, videos, digital pictures, or even vocals) in the form of harassment, aggressive, sexual, or menacing content, on the one hand. On the other hand, it can also occur through social media posts delivering slander, hate or racism. Furthermore, in addition to using another one’s personal information or pictures on the web without his/her own permission, forcing or making others to engage in undesired communications is also considered as cyber bullying (Sharma et al., 2010).

Cyber bullying, also called electronic bullying, is increasingly propagating. A study that was held in 2008 over American middle school students says that more than fifteen percent of them have been bullied for at least once in their lives. Another recent research, however, says that the number of teenagers that have been bullied exceeded 59 % in America (Owaida, 2020). In Europe, surveys show that the percentage of young people that have been electronically bullied in the year 2006 fluctuated, from one nation to another, between 10 % and 50 % (Sharma et al., 2010). Likewise, an Algerian study revealed a great number of Facebook users using random pejorative comments on different topics and figures that have been displayed on different Facebook pages (Abainia, 2022).

Figure N° 1. The Exceeding Propagation of Bullying in the American Society



(Bullying Statistics”, 2020”)

Fighting cyberbullying is considered as a herculean social challenge for the time being due to its rapid growth among young people and adults alike. It is not surprising that the number of the victims of this electronic pandemic is going higher, regarding the growing evolution of the different electronic devices and technologies, as well as the impossibility of not using them. Hence, cyber bullying is now recognized for being more dangerous than the physical (face-to-face) one

due to several reasons. First of all, electronic bullying provides a comfortable setting for the bully to do his job. Putting it differently, the invisibility of this electronic criminal free bullies from judgment, intervention, or social objection. Besides this, the bully can also hide behind an anonymous profile, to send whatever pejorative message he wants to deliver, easily and effortlessly, and without even being recognized (Ouwaïda, 2020).

Moreover, e-victimization happens through media that are nowadays inseparable from people. Therefore, individuals can be bullied even when they are alone, in their own apartments, inside their personal rooms, and on their cozy beds! The latter, also, made it difficult for parents, mainly, to be aware of the victimization that their children can go through, because of the inability of most of them to master the use of electronic media, as well as the discreteness of the process of bullying taking place through personal technological devices (Sharma et al. 2010).

1.2 Face-to-Face Bullying

Face-to-face bullying, also called traditional bullying, was defined by Olweus (1996) as the “aggression from two or more individuals that repeatedly targets a person who cannot defend himself or herself” (qtd in Guomundsson, 2013, p. 03). This type of victimization “can be in the form of intimidation, exclusion, harassment, or mistreatment, and can be direct (physical or verbal) or indirect (threats, insults, etc.) (Hunter et al., 2004). In other words, physical bullying is associated with the use of material or physical power, while the verbal one covers “insults, teasing, taunting, and names calling” (qtd in Guomundsson, 2013, p. 03). Indirect bullying comprises all indirect forms of damaging and hurting people. Relational victimization, for instance, is an indirect form of it. It occurs when the bully ruins somebody’s relationship with his surroundings through exclusion, defamation, or any other way that either leads the bullied to move away from people or causes those other people to cut their ties with the victim.

Traditional bullying is a social phenomenon that has quite a notable effect on nowadays societies. According to scholars in the field of human and social sciences, it is a blight that can break the stability of people and societies more than other social problems can do. Verily, although many specialists argue that it became of less occurrence and effectiveness with the enactment of strict laws and the propagation of cyber bullying, traditional bullying, according to *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal*, “remains considerably more common than cyberbullying” (University of Oxford, 2017, para. 01). In Seville – Spain -, the rate of elementary and high schools’ students that have been physically or verbally

bullied Swung between 15 % and 30 % (Mora-Merchan, 2006). Seemingly, it was noted that the number of bullied among children in elementary school was dangerously increasing (Guomundsson, 2013).

One reason why some views believe that traditional bullying is more cruel than cyber bullying is the fact that the former's impacts might be felt but remain untouchable, and the bully might be exempted from judicial follow-up as the damage is most of the time unseen and unheard. As for the latter, however, the bully can most of the time be caught, as electronic footprints can be easily spotted with nowadays technological advancements used by police. Therefore, traditional bullying remains more menacing and brutal than the electronic one (Queensland University of Technology, 2015).

2. The Psychological Impacts of Bullying

Bullying is often interpreted as a form of aggression towards individuals, or a group of people, and it can be seen all over the world. Olweus (1997) argues that "bullying is a pervasive problem nationally and internationally" (cited in Beebe 2011, p. 34). This latter has been dealt with from diverse angles articulating significant factors as it comes with several negative consequences, touching families, kids and even minorities in the community. However, its psychological impacts are of the main topics that should be stressed upon; In fact, bullying affects the psychological well-being of the bullied. It could lead to constant stress and feeling of unsafety, insecurity, as well as to suicidal habits and lack of sleep. Moreover, victims always feel trapped because they are being threatened and blackmailed by individuals who are victimizing them. Therefore, such consequences are considered as serious dangers, of no less harm than physical violence, as both end up wrecking and weakening the biological health of the targeted person

2.1 The Bully & the Bullied through the Psychological Scope

To understand the impact of bullying, it is necessary to try to fathom the reasons that lead to such a behavior. Bullying as a complex attitude is likely developed at an early age during childhood, and it reaches its peak with adolescence; research shows that bullies per se are victims of bullying. A study on how this social problem is developed and the reasons behind it was made by the *Ditch Label* website, whereby the researchers conducted a qualitative and quantitative research method to investigate the matter. Answers of 7,347 people who have been asked whether, or not, they have ever bullied someone in their lives

revealed a number of 1,239 who admitted that they have. This led researchers that were in charge of this research to ask the same people on the reasons that made them commit such despicable acts (Label, 2021, para.12). Overall, the research concluded that bullying is not an innate behaviour. Rather, it is a learned one in so far most of the results agreed on the fact that a male bullies more than a female. Therein, men tend to develop aggressive behaviors when they reach adulthood, as way through which they can demonstrate their manly qualities, the thing that transforms into a toxic behaviour like bullying (para.13).

As it has been stated above, the society that bullies are associated with also plays a role in the building of their characters, and eventually it either helps in creating a normal child free from such behaviors or it influences their demeanors and the implementation of violent orientations in their mindsets. According to an article entitled '*The Mind Behind the Bully*'(n.d.) the authors argue that bullying is developed "between the toddler and the preschool years" (para.1) which brings us to the early stages of bullying. Later on, the child familiarizes with this behavior specially when the parents are not aware of what is happening at schools. Besides that, parental interaction with children also has an intensive effect on their behaviors outside the house, especially if the parents use violence and aggressive methods as a means of discipline. In this vein, the previously mentioned article states that children tend "...to use the same methods to get their peers to cooperate with them "(para.2).

Bullying affects the self-esteem of both the bullies and the bullied. The latter will develop a lack of interaction and mainly become introverts who are afraid to deal with others and who live in a constant fear that they will be bullied another time. Most of the time, they get depressed and may develop suicidal thoughts. In contrast, the former will also acquire egoistic attributions whenever they bully someone, it may give them a feeling of satisfaction and empowerment because they see someone less than them, and they also build up a utopian self-image (Label, para. 14). However, quitting this bad social habit remains possible. According to Hawley and Williford, "children who regularly bully are likely to efficiently resolve this internal discord by further entrenching into anti-victim values in a manner contrary to intervention goals" (p.6). In other words, being exposed to psychological counseling, as well as educational guidance, might be of help to bullies to be aware of the perilous impacts of their bad deeds, the thing that might lead to quitting bullying.

Moreover, bullies are usually identified as individuals who suffer from mental health and other psychological disorders. Ybarra & Mitchell (2004) argue that "Earlier research found that youth who report aggressive bullying behaviors

were likely to experience psychosocial challenges, including problem behavior, substance use, depressive symptomatology, and a low school commitment” (Qtd in Beebe, 2010, p. 36). In other words, the people who bully others are internally struggling with their conflicting attitudes, perhaps because they lack something in their lives, so they tend to use bullying as a way of expressing their frustration. An article, titled *Bullying: Psychology Today*, indicated that :

People bully because it can be an effective way of getting what they want, at least in the short term, and because they lack the social skills to do so without harming others. Bullying also is a way of establishing social dominance, although over time, as children’s behavioral repertoires generally broaden, it becomes an increasingly dysfunctional way. (n.d., para.4).

Therefore, one of the features of the bully is seen through the way they demonstrate power on weak individuals because “they lack prosocial behavior, are untroubled by anxiety, and do not understand others’ feelings” (*Bullying: Psychology Today*, n.d., para.6). Bullies tend to feel alienated and incapable of socializing. Most of them have their own world where they keep themselves isolated or surround themselves with people who follow them because either they are afraid of them, or because they are bullies as well. This could be seen in schools and criminal gangs.

Hence, the representation of the bully in the society is usually viewed from one point of view. Very few people try to understand what is behind such a behavior, but thankfully psychologists tried to uncover this area by doing several research; and going back to the subject of low self-esteem, *The Mind Behind the Bully* (n.d.) argues that bullying is an acquired behavior rather than innate, kids are born normal but the environment in which they are raised, has such an impact on their identity progress and it could result in anything. The child is becoming defensive and use bullying as a fence to protect themselves and this could result in “low self-esteem, which, coupled with aggressive behavior, can create a child who not only lacks communication skills but feels the need to defend themselves constantly” (para.8).

2.2. The Algerian Case

Recently, with the continuous news on violence and bullying incidents throughout the world, the subject of this social problem turned out to be an intense phenomenon almost everywhere on our planet, and the Algerian spot is no exception. In fact, bullying in Algeria is associated with violence and aggressive attitudes especially at schools and playgrounds.

Several studies have been conducted upon victims at Algerian schools. The results that Habib Tiliouine, an Algerian researcher, came up with were categorized according to different factors, amongst which was the financial background of the family. Tiliouine's research shows that kids coming from poor families are likely to be bullied because their parents cannot afford necessities such as clothes, books and so on. This, according to the previously mentioned scholar, made it easy for bullies to victimize the bullied. Therefore, the stability of the family also has got a hand in the bullying process, for example when a family lives in a different country with a different culture and language, then suddenly comes back to Algeria, their children will be looked at differently by others, and in most cases, they will likely experience bullying. (Tiliouine, 2014, p 7. 8).

Undeniably, violence in Algerian schools is notably an outcome of problems within the whole community. It is also considered a major factor and an outcome of bullying in schools. Studies have been done to cover the impacts of violence on children, how it affects their personalities, and how it is distributed throughout the country. What was noted is that bullying actually comes with violent behaviors and this has to do with the psychology of the child and the background they come from. Some students suffer from bullying at home with their parents, this is why they use violence with others, as a way of self-defense. Sahel & Mokrane (2019), Algerian researchers, added their voices to Tiliouine, and indicated that families, and the conditions as well as the environments they put their children into, do play a key element in affecting the children's tendencies. In this vein, they argued that:

For instance, emotional deprivation caused by parents, bad treatment (either verbal, physical or breaking of furniture) odd economic conditions, the manifestations of physical and moral family disintegration, all of these, obviously, affect negatively the child's future, starting with manifestations of violence in the outside, in the street, and after that – in school, either with his peers, teachers and even with himself (p.69).

Moreover, at schools, those children are likely to develop aggressive attitudes which result in bullying each other. Sometimes, even the teachers contribute to the spread of bullying. Some instances could be mentioned like when the teacher does not know how to treat students and end up embarrassing them in front of the whole class. This would lead to depression and aggressive deeds from the part of the student, and thus the whole way of dealing with the situation places the teacher on a same scale with bullies. In light of this, Sahel and Mokrane proceeded:

The teacher's marginalization of the pupil/student, contempt, non-appreciating in front of classmates, inhibition of her/his potentials, lack of pupil/student motivation to school achievement, irons and mockery, all these factors lead the pupil to depression which in its turn gives way to aggressive and violent behavior towards the teacher and peers (2019, p. 69).

Finally, one cannot deny the fact that gender and age also have a word in the act of bullying. The overall calculations of a study that has been conducted over the victimization of 4532 Algerian school going adolescents reported that about 61 % of males took part in physical fighting. On the other side, the same studies found out that the rate of female having been involved in a fight is 35 % (Rudatskira et al., 2014, p. 410), still a high rate although the situation is even worse on males' side.

All in all, bullying in Algeria shares the same catalysts as in any other spot from our planet. The environment that a family offers at home, the atmosphere that a tutor ensures during a class, along with gender and age, are three among many factors which affect the students' social and psychological development, and thus reflect their lifestyle choices. Hence, most of students who experienced the phenomenon of bullying were, according to the previously mentioned studies, adolescent males from financially poor familial backgrounds, who were badly treated at schools. For this reason, parents should try to provide a better life for their children, pay close attention to their kids' attitudes, as well as to their situation at schools, and of course communication is needed to keep away from bullying, or being bullied.

3. What is the Solution?

Bullying as a phenomenon has been around for a long period of time, but nowadays it comes in different forms, traditional and modern. The latter is addressed by scholars due to its dangerous outcomes on our society, especially children. In this line of ideas, psychologists suggested a set of techniques to help prevent the spread of bullying. Some of the solutions provided encouraging people who fall victims to keep themselves positive and understand that it is not their fault to be bullied and no one deserves to be bullied; also, the best thing to do once being bullied is to not keep it to themselves and try to talk about it whether with friends, family members, or even colleagues (*Cyberbullying*, 2020 Parag 8). Communication is actually a key element in solving such a problem, and studies proved that talking about one's own issues helps in lessening stress, sadness, fear, and psychological pressure.

According to Divecha (2019), it is commonly known that not all approaches of prevention work in all cases but raising awareness could help in some way. She suggests that keeping a positive atmosphere at school would be of great help for kids. Also, promoting for a positive culture among students helps them understand each other by learning about differences, such as diverse backgrounds and races, so that they get used to the inclusiveness of the society they live in. Eventually, those children will start accepting others. Another solution is through leadership, and by this we mean addressing the topic of bullying at schools and talking about it among peers through motivational speeches. Furthermore, building a leadership program in which more students can express themselves, talk about their own struggles and experiences, and raise awareness about social issues like that of bullying (para. 5-6).

Conclusion

In recent years, the phenomenon of bullying has become a rampant evil that spreads its shadows over our societies. With its two types, modern and traditional, it is now regarded among the most dangerous behaviors that harm individuals. Hence, this phenomenon is affecting teenagers and children at a large scale. The traditional type of bullying is concerned with physical aggression and illusive attitudes towards people, the bullies tend to use violence to bully their victims as it has been stated before. This type of bullying is considered less occurrent compared to the modern type since it requires direct confrontations to cause harm. Unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying, which is the more prevalent nowadays, is rather a lethal weapon that targets individuals behind the walls of the internet. Cyber-bullies have their own grotesque empire whereby they unleash hateful comments, videos, and rumors to hurt other people.

This article tackled the reasons behind bullying to occur in the first place, which required a psychological study on the mind of the bully and the consequences of this attitude on bullies as victims. The focus was put on Algeria as a case study ; however, some international statistics were provided to highlight the matter significantly. Thus, the results this study offers are that bullying has got its psychological and social interpretations, bullies and bullied have got a strong relationship even though it seems that they look nothing alike. It is true that one is the victim and the other is the bully but according to studies and observations, in most of the cases, bullies are actually victims of bullying in the first place. Our proposed solutions did not attempt to excuse the act of bullying whatsoever. Rather, they were stated to provide an explanation on the psychological level

of the bully with an attempt to provide suggestions on how to deal with such attitudes, to prevent them from happening.

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Abstract

One of the main social problems facing the healthy coexistence of people in today's societies is bullying. Various debates have been sparked over the serious perils that this phenomenon is capable of bringing, especially at the psychological level. Children, being the most delicate social range, are increasingly suffering from the negative impacts of that social plague. The latter witnessed an evolution through time. Currently, it is enlarging its legs to land everywhere, offering bullies the chance to practice their fad effortlessly and non-confrontationally, thanks to technology and the internet. Hence, the writers of this paper intend to lay

research which aims at uncovering the problem of bullying and its traditional and modern types. Mainly, emphases were given to the modern type of it, namely, cyberbullying. Also, this paper spotlights the main negative psychological issues that bullying implants in the lives of people in general, picking out (Algerian) teens as a sample case. For this, statistics and previous research was used to back up the work. Eventually, the writers of this paper suggest some solutions to victims, that might be of help to them to overcome the negative impacts that this social plague can have over their lives.

Keywords

Algeria, children, (Cyber)Bullying, Psychological impacts, Society

مستخلص

تعد ظاهرة التنمر أحد أهم المشاكل الاجتماعية التي تعرقل التعايش السلمي للمجتمعات في عصرنا الحالي، وذلك لما يترتب عنها من أضرار ومخاطر، خاصة من الناحية النفسية. ويعد الأطفال الشريحة الأكثر تضرراً من هذه الممارسات اللاأخلاقية التي شهدت تطوراً أودى بها إلى الظهور بصور شتى، تقليدية وعصرية. فأما الصورة التقليدية للتنمر فتتمثل في الاعتداءات الجسدية أو اللفظية على الأشخاص. وأما عن المظهر العصري لهذه الظاهرة الاجتماعية فهو يتجلى في ممارسة العنف على الأشخاص إلكترونياً، وهو يعد أخطر أنواع التنمر فتكاً بالضحية. لذلك، من خلال هذا العمل البحثي، تصبو الباحثتان إلى تسليط الضوء على مفهوم التنمر والتعريف بأنواعه وكذا مخاطره. وقد خص هذا العمل الأثر النفسي الذي تخلفه هذه الظاهرة على النمو الصحي للأطفال والمراهقين عامة، ثم المنتميين منهم إلى المجتمع الجزائري خاصة. من أجل هذا، تم تحليل دراسات وإحصائيات سابقة لدعم النتائج المتوصل إليها. في الأخير تم طرح بعض الحلول الهادفة إلى تذليل مهمة محاربة هذا الوباء الأخلاقي المتفشى في مجتمعاتنا، لتقليص تأثيراته السلبية الهادمة.

كلمات مفتاحية

الأطفال، الأضرار النفسية، التنمر (الإلكتروني)، الجزائر، المجتمع

Résumé

Le harcèlement est l'un des principaux problèmes sociaux auxquels est confronté l'humanité aujourd'hui. Divers débats ont été suscités sur les graves conséquences que ce phénomène est capable d'apporter, notamment au niveau psychologique. Les enfants étant la tranche sociale la plus délicate, souffrent de plus en plus de la cruauté de ce fléau social. Ce dernier a connu une évolution dans le temps. Actuellement, grâce à la technologie et à Internet, il ne cesse d'étendre ses bras dans le but de gérer les harceleurs, en leur donnant diverses possibilités de pratiquer ce qu'ils veulent. Par conséquent, les auteurs de cet article ont l'intention d'établir une recherche qui vise à découvrir le problème du harcèlement et ses types traditionnels et modernes. L'accent a principalement été mis sur le type

moderne de celui-ci, à savoir le cyberharcèlement. En outre, cet article met en évidence les principaux problèmes psychologiques que le harcèlement implante dans la vie des gens, en prenant les adolescents (algériens) comme exemple. Pour cela, des statistiques et des recherches antérieures ont été utilisées pour fortifier le travail. Finalement, les auteurs de cet article proposent des solutions aux victimes, qui pourraient les aider à surmonter les effets néfastes que ce fléau social peut avoir sur leur vie.

Mots-clés

Algérie, (Cyber)Harcèlement, Enfants, Les impacts psychologiques, Société