Cyberbullying and Cyber-victimization: From Online Suicide Groups to 'Blue Whale' Menace

Cyberbullying is still not considered a major public health problem in India. It is a new form of bullying taking place while using electronic technology by text or media messages, mass e-mailing, and over Internet blogs or social networking sites. While traditional bullying is assertion of power through physical, social or emotional means of aggression, and is of limited reach, cyber bullying is beyond physical boundaries, can be anonymous, and may be done from any part of the world [1].

In the past decade or so, cyberbullying has become a major public health problem around the world [2]. With increasing availability of smartphones and social media, Indian children and adolescents are having increased access and exposure to cyber world. Internet undoubtedly provides new information and easy social networking, but also has risk of cyberbullying, cyber victimization, internet addiction, internet frauds and other health risks [3].

'Blue whale' is an online challenge-based game to be completed over a period of 50 days. Participants are given series of task on online forums. It includes self — harm activities, and participants must post pictures of task completion to go to next level; final task being suicide. This game was initiated by a Russian college dropout in 2013 on social network 'VKontakte' [4]. Reports suggest it has claimed more than 150 lives worldwide, and few in India too. Concerned over adolescents' suicides by this game of death, the Electronics and Information Technology ministry of Government of India has asked Internet giants – Google, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Microsoft and Yahoo – to ensure immediate removal to any links on their platform leading to such gaming sites.

Every new scientific discovery or technology developed even for betterment of mankind has both pros and cons. Question is with what intention and to what degree it is being used. No wonder computers, laptops, notebooks, smartphones or I-pads, which were to help us in daily and professional lives, are consuming a lot of our time resulting in less personal eye-to- eye communication and more e-communication. This may be resulting in lot of social problems. As per an old Sanskrit saying *'Ati Sarvatra Varjayet'* that means 'excess of anything is bad', there should be parental guidance and control about use of Internet and use of social networks. Studies have shown that cyberbullying is more strongly related to suicidal ideation compared with traditional bullying [5]. Children and adolescents should have a better communication with parents and teachers to reduce the negative effects of cyberbullying.

SHAHID AKHTAR SIDDIQUI
Department of Pediatrics,
SN Children Hospital,
MLN Medical College, Allahabad, India.
sha.akht@yahoo.com

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