ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Cyberbullying on Social Media: an Analysis of Teachers' Unheard Voices and Coping Strategies in Nepal

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Abstract

Teachers can be potential victims of cyberbullying, particularly targeted by their students at their workplaces. The growing use of social media has been observed promoting cyberbullying in addition to face-to-face bullying. Often neglected by academic organisations and policymakers, cyberbullying has become one of the biggest challenges for teachers to manage normal teaching and learning. This article reports an examination of teachers' experiences of how they were cyberbullied by students particularly on social media and their coping mechanisms. This qualitative study utilised online semi-structured interviews with twenty teachers and observation of their Facebook account to explore their familiarities with the digital era agitations. Findings indicate how teachers on social media become victims of trivial belittling, unethical requests, uninvited sexual advances made by students and colleagues, insolence, sabotaging of shared contents and trolling of manipulative contents. While this article explored individual coping strategies of sharing, ignoring and enhancing self-efficacy to handle technology strongly and confidently, it concludes with the implications of collaborative coordination necessary for the development of strong policies and strict cyber laws for ensuring teachers' cybersecurity in similar contexts.

Keywords Cyberbullying · Cyber law · Teachers' experiences · Social media · Coping strategies

Introduction

Cyberbullying, one of the forms of bullying behaviour, is experienced when using various social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter for open communications and may be deliberately imposed on someone to harm or harass (Huang et al., 2014). Cyberbullying, a form of harassment, is experienced through email, live messaging and communication, online sites and games and texts or pictures sent to mobiles (Kowalski et al., 2012). Bullying is a deliberate abuse of power including physical and verbal attacks, threats, gossip and intentional removal from a gang as a result of actual or perceived power inequalities among school-going youths causing long-term physical, societal or

mental harm to those involved, including onlookers (Government of United States, 2020). Cyberbullying has been increasingly experienced with the increasing access to internet facilities although physical attacks used to be the dominant form of harassment before the common access to the internet (Xu et al., 2012). It is argued that social media have become a means of communication as well as a source of bullying (Zhao et al., 2016).

The increasing pressure of using technology and access to the digital technology available for youths has increased cyberbullying in Nepal (Kumar, 2020). Cyberbullying (49%) has the highest risk among other risks followed by online erotic activities (26%) and criminal influence by online strangers (15%) (The Kathmandu Post, 2018). Although everyone can be a victim of cyberbullying, teenagers particularly students are likely to be the common subject of cyberbullying. Even teachers can be a casualty of bullying through a simple mean statement posted against them on the wall of social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter (Tolentino, 2016). Such practices on the digital platform often include insults related to intelligence (using words portraying somebody unskilful, imprudent, lacking intellect), bodily features (using body-shaming images,

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passing remarks poking the physical appearance like dark skin or burnt skin tone, wrinkled face and so on) and value (using tags and qualifiers signifying the worthlessness of the target) of victims (Hua et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2016). Online bullying ultimately brings humiliation to victims whether through the use of cruel language or dissemination of photos, videos and audio, making the impacts much more intense than physical bullying due to its wider and easy access (Kopecký, 2014). Also, the anonymity and lack of fear to be punished immediately in the digital platforms have probably increased the sexual harassment on women (Nova et al., 2019). Such online humiliation often makes the victims much more anxious (Campbell et al., 2012), sometimes even causing a sense of mortification, making them lose their self-assurance, questioning their abilities and subsequently generating a threat in them even to carry their jobs efficiently (Tolentino, 2016). The threats from sharing or posting aggressive, intimidating or distressful messages develop the fear, sometimes, to an extent that can lead the victims to self-harm (Willard, 2007).

There are hardly any actions taken against such digital exploitations in Nepal and people deliberately ignore bullying behaviours either because of fear or social stigma (Shrestha, 2022). Instead, people experiencing cyberbullying are mostly advised to deactivate their online accounts, block access and disconnect devices to prevent further bullying behaviours (Chatzakou et al., 2017). Several coping strategies such as being cautious about sharing content, carefully filtering the friend list, organising confidentiality settings, sharing the problem with someone near, boosting self-assurance, enhancing self-efficiency and reporting to the cyber cell if necessary can be applied to overcome cyberbullying (Cuesta Medina et al., 2020). Although *Electronic Transaction Act 2063 (2008)* explicitly states the legal action against cybercrimes such as dissemination of prohibited materials (Nepal Law Commission, 2008), against someone, the regulation is unknown to many people in Nepal. The implementation of criminal law is weak and there is still a lack of effective means, tools and technologies to understand and minimise cyberbullying, particularly sexual advances, threats and defamation experienced by teachers in this study.

With the increasing access to electronic and online communication, cyberbullying has become a dominant form of bullying behaviour exercised by students and is no longer limited to the school premises (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007). The most common forms of electronic abuses experienced by teachers include publishing of teachers' obscene and edited images and audio-visual clips on fake Facebook pages, propagating abusive, hurtful and embarrassing statements against them, hacking their email accounts, sharing viruses and disseminating offensive comments through email, text messages, chat rooms or web page (Eden et al., 2013; Garrett, 2014; Kauppi & Pörhölä,

2012a; Tolentino, 2016). Apart from these, teachers are also subjected to physical bullying (physical threats, throwing stuff, pinching, theft and damaging of belongings), direct verbal bullying (name-calling, verbal abuse, giggling at the teachers), direct nonverbal bullying (insolence, imitating teachers' style, inappropriate touching, showing disruptive behaviours) and indirect bullying (non-cooperation, ignoring, making false complaints using parents, spreading false rumours) (James et al., 2008; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012b; Mooij, 2011). De Wet (2010) argues that teachers' inability to handle and discipline students, their strict behaviour and the low grade that they give to students are major causes of being bullied by students. College students' sexual advances to particularly young female teachers, threats and defamation on social media are matters of investigation. These issues provoked some questions such as the following: How is school teachers' experience of bullying on social media? In what ways are school teachers bullied on social media? How do school teachers manage to overcome cyberbullying? Moreover, cyberbullying is an emerging issue in the context of Nepal due to the growing use of the internet, particularly social media. However, it is yet to be considered a major concern of individual life. Based on limited literature in this area in the context of Nepal, we assumed that the policymakers, educational organisations and investigators have limited information on the existence, occurrences and contributing factors of cyberbullying particularly against teachers. We expect that this study establishes an important foundation for future work in this field. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to report an analysis of school teachers' experiences of cyberbullying and their strategies for overcoming such issues in the context of Nepal.

Teacher's Experience of Bullying on Social Networking Sites

Information and communication technology has become a necessity of modern society, particularly for people to pursue education, get job opportunities, promote business and communicate information (Clarke et al., 2015; Rana et al., 2020). However, Privitera and Campbell (2009) argue that internet facilities have increased the chances of cyberbullying. Research (Pyzalski, 2012) in Polish schools, for example, reported that while the majority of students (66%) bullied others in various ways through internet means, their bullying behaviour towards teachers was lower than towards others such as friends, celebrities, football team and helpless adults. Similar research (Eden et al., 2013) in Israel investigated that teacher-targeted cyberbullying was less than face-to-face bullying. However, many studies (Garrett, 2014; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012a; Macaulay et al., 2018) have reported that there has been a rise in the tendency of cyberbullying

against teachers through activities such as spreading humiliating photos of teachers, verbal aggression, belittling, insult, ridicule and offensive remarks through email, texts and fake Facebook pages.

Derogatory language is significantly used to bully others on social media (Van Hee et al., 2018). A case study (Reddy et al., 2013) in America reported that students bullied teachers with threatening messages through Facebook, email and phone calls along with physical attacks. A phenomenological study of Tolentino (2016) in the Philippines investigated that Facebook was the most commonly used social networking site to frequently post spiteful statements against teachers out of anger against the punishment given to students in the classroom. Similarly, research (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016) in the UK found different types of cyberbullying against teachers such as cyber-baiting (where the students intentionally provoke the teachers, record their reactions and exchange those recordings with friends through Facebook Messenger or post it on YouTube), flaming (disseminating aggressive and unrefined messages), stalking (online threats), masquerading (hiding one's true identity and acting to be somebody else by posting comments to make the target look evil) and outing (propagating delicate and demeaning information). A case study (Bester et al., 2017) in South Africa explored the experience of a teacher as a victim of denigration, a kind of cyberbullying by circulating or posting false sexually oriented pictures and statements. However, there is a paucity of comprehensive research in the area of school bullying in Nepal probably because the concerned authorities have a lack of sensitivity to such issues (Rana, 2008).

Context of Bullying

Bullying takes place with the exploitation of irregular power balance, where the targets fail to escape (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Terry, 1998). A survey (Pervin & Turner, 1998) in London identified that teachers were targeted by their students due to their lack of confidence and essential experiences. An internet-based survey (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006) in different countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and others) reported that the chance to remain anonymous and physically distant from a confrontation was the prime reason for the popularity of online bullying among children. Similarly, quantitative research (Chen & Astor, 2008) in Taiwan investigated that students admitted to targeting their teachers because they felt their teachers had irrational demands, unfair dealings and disparities, and had given them needless punishments. However, Mooij (2011) argued that the lack of social connectivity between teachers, learners and school management resulted in anti-social behaviours such as bullying.

The lack of patience in young teachers, their lack of ability to control classes, sometimes their extra efforts to become too strict and parents' disrespectful attitude towards them encourage students to bully teachers (De Wet, 2012). In her study in the USA, Yahn (2012) has argued that bullying occurs with a focus to disregard, disempower, defeat and govern the victims. A similar study (Vogl-Bauer, 2014) has reported that students target their teachers on digital platforms to reach a larger audience to express their dissatisfaction and take revenge on their teachers. The attention-seeking tendency and the desire to be in the limelight encourage bullying activities on various online platforms (Chang et al., 2018). However, Cilliers and Chinyamurindi (2020) have argued that the increasing popularity and accessibility of the internet has eased students to involve in cyberbullying activities. Nevertheless, bullying behaviours are different in various contexts and bullying generally takes place when someone, for example, a teacher or student, shows an odd behaviour and it is not accepted by others (Kruger, 2011).

Strategy of Overcoming Bullying

Most teachers fail to deal with bullying due to their low level of confidence. They, therefore, need to be provided with necessary training to cope with bullying (Boulton, 1997). However, Terry (1998) argues that when bullying results in stress-related illness, teachers need to seek legal compensation as a way of overcoming bullying. In their research in the USA, Keith and Martin (2005) state that overcoming cyberbullying, in particular, is a tough job due to its unlimited and easy access to others. They emphasise that schools should implement zero-tolerance policies towards any kind of bullying activity. Some studies (Cemaloglu, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011) have reported that violence against teachers generally leads to harmful physical, emotional, social and psychological effects on teachers dropping their self-esteem and commitments to the profession and increasing anxiety and depression that is hard to overcome. James et al. (2008) argue that when teachers alone cannot overcome bullying, they need to seek support from the principal, parents and colleagues to deal with bullying.

It is difficult to control hidden and unspecified cyberbullying through social networking sites (Boulton et al., 2014). Research (Ramirez, 2013) in the USA suggested two categories of strategies to regulate bullying: (i) aggressive strategies/direct strategies (taking direct actions like confronting bully, seeking revenge through punishments, taking legal action and leaving the job), and (ii) problem-solving strategies/indirect strategies (drinking, avoiding, pardoning and patching up, concealing by suppressing true emotions and laughing out at the bully and seeking emotional support from friends, family and co-workers). Similarly, Fahie and Devine (2014) in their research in Ireland

suggested three types of resistance strategies: (i) overt strategies (leaving the job, taking legal action and challenging the harasser), (ii) embodied strategies (wearing dark as if preparing for battle and also avoiding interactions with others) and (iii) covert strategies (contributing in the study, communicating with the trade union privately, keeping notes and records of the bully, taking therapy, taking the pet out, taking religious guidance and requesting support from family/colleagues). Ignoring cyberbullying as if it never existed, deactivating the account and remaining invisible for a certain duration of time are the most applied strategies against cyberbullying in the absence of strict rules and regulations to treat such behaviours (Koirala, 2020). However, Dwiningrum et al. (2020) survey in Jakarta suggests that encouraging the students in creative and interactive student-centred learning activities can help teachers fight bullying behaviours effectively. A collaborative work, thus, with constant support from the school management, and training and guidance to teachers in coordination with parents and students are essential for constructing a positive classroom environment to cope with bullying as far as possible (Espelage et al., 2013; Kopecky & Szotkowski, 2017).

The international literature in the above sections informs how teachers deal with cyberbullying and overcome the problem. The lack of literature in this area in the context of Nepal allowed us to only presume how teachers in Nepal would analyse, interpret and overcome cyberbullying. As mentioned in the "Introduction" section, we formulated research questions, reviewed the literature and developed a research design.

Method

Measures and Procedures

This research reports an analysis of numerous forms of cyberbullying experiences of teachers, particularly on social media. This qualitative study employed an online semi-structured interview with the participants and observation of their Facebook wall to gather qualitative information. In particular, a qualitative interpretive design that focuses on how human beings interpret their experiences and reality (Cohen et al., 2013) was implemented to understand how teachers would interpret their lived experiences of cyberbullying. The first author obtained ethics approval from the Faculty Research Committee in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Education, King's University (pseudonym), before starting the fieldwork. With the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, their informed consent was obtained before the interviews with them. Then, the online semi-structured interviews were conducted on multiple occasions following the issues raised in the interviews by using Zoom and Messenger apps. Before conducting actual interviews with the participants, we had informal conversations on phone more than twice which helped us build a rapport with participants. Especially, such conversations increased participants' trust in us and conduct interviews with them comfortably. For the interviews, we emailed a Zoom link to those participants who used email and invited them to live meetings. We also used Facebook Messenger for the interviews with some participants depending on their convenience. An interview schedule (see Table 1) that we developed to lead the interviews was used to conduct interviews with participants. The interviews were recorded on a laptop.

In addition, we followed the online non-participant observation method (Cohen et al., 2013) to observe the teachers' Facebook wall that further reinforced the data gathered through interviews. We chose Facebook as a representative of social media because it is one of the most popular social networking sites in Nepal. The first author observed participant teachers' Facebook walls for 3 months following their consent that we obtained beforehand. Although checklists or rating scales were not used as in the systematic observation

Table 1 Interview schedule

a	What have you understood about cyberbullying?
b	How is your experience of using social media like Facebook with students?
c	What kind of content do you normally talk about with your students on Facebook? Do your students use abusive language to you or teachers?
d	Have you ever felt uncomfortable with any kind of students' abnormal behaviours to you and your colleagues on Facebook? If so, how do they misbehave you on Facebook?
e	Have you ever experienced any other sorts of bullying? If so, what activities do they do to bully you or your colleagues?
f	What did you feel when students misbehaved you on Facebook? Any anxiety, harassment, torture or more?
g	What did you do to overcome the impacts of such experiences?
h	Did you report about it at your working place? What sort of help did you receive from administration or colleagues?
i	Did you seek any legal support to deal with students' bullying behaviours on Facebook? If you did, how was the response from legal agency?
j	Do you have any idea regarding any provisions against cyberbullying in Nepal? What is your personal take about the necessity of addressing this problem?
k	What might be the reasons behind students bullying teachers?

method, we followed major research questions, interview schedules and issues raised in interviews. Initially, we asked the participants involved in this study to accept our friend request on Facebook and they accepted our friend request. This allowed us to observe their Facebook wall. An observational diary was developed to follow the systematic analysis of overall data. Moreover, screenshots of participants' Facebook walls were saved on a personal computer and mobile phone.

Participants

We identified the schools involved in this study from the government list of schools and approached them through friends who helped communicate with headteachers. Then, headteachers enabled us to contact their teachers. Information sheets and consent forms were emailed to many teachers for their expression of interest in this study. Based on the 'first-come-first-serve' approach, two teachers from each school were involved in this study. Although we tried to balance the gender, it could not happen because all the targeted teachers did not reply. However, it was not a high difference between the size of female (11 out of 20, i.e. 55%) and male (9 out of 20, i.e. 45%) participants. The participants were selected based on their willingness and contacted beforehand on their mobile phone, via Facebook Messenger and through email, to build up a rapport and

mutual trust due to the sensitivity of the topic. As suggested by Kothari (2004), participants were selected purposively from ten urban schools located in five districts. Table 2 below summarises the details of the participants involved in this study. Altogether, 20 secondary teachers (two from each school) were involved in this study based on their voluntary participation. The age of participants ranged from 26 to 41 ($R = 15$) and the mean age was 33.8 ($\bar{x} = 33.8$). The age of participants was deviated by 4.06 (s.d. $= 4.06$) from the mean age. Similarly, teachers' teaching experience ranged from 5 to 19 ($R = 14$) years and the mean of their experience was 10.1 ($\bar{x} = 10.1$) years. Participants' teaching experience was deviated by 3.4 (s.d. $= 3.4$) from the mean. We targeted secondary teachers as our participants because they teach teenage students (secondary school students). Based on our experiences of dealing with teenage students' bullying behaviours, we planned and conducted this study to investigate other secondary teachers' (who taught same-level students across the country) experiences of cyberbullying. Participants and their schools' original names are replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Analysis

The data gathered through interviews and observations were thematically analysed based on the idea of Clarke et al.

Table 2 Participant teachers

School	District	Participant	Gender	Age	Year of teaching experience
Arohan School	Kathmandu	Badal	Male	30	10
		Sarala	Female	31	8
Birat School	Kathmandu	Akansha	Female	30	10
		Sarita	Female	35	8
TT College	Bhaktapur	Binita	Female	37	10
		Bhusan	Male	41	15
Bagmati Higher Secondary School	Bhaktapur	Bhawana	Female	40	19
		Sambhavi	Female	30	10
Ambience Boarding School	Jhapa	Rakesh	Male	37	10
		Safal	Male	34	8
Devkota Academy	Jhapa	Birat	Male	40	5
		Bibhu	Female	35	12
Buddha Medical College	Palpa	Kartik	Male	31	6
		Kunti	Female	30	8
Raniban School	Palpa	Sujata	Female	31	11
		Suman	Male	35	15
Vocational Technical School	Kaski	Rohit	Male	38	10
		Rita	Female	35	14
Devaki School	Kaski	Ambika	Female	26	5
		Amul	Male	30	8

(2015). An inductive approach to data analysis helped us identify themes, organise a wide range of data into specific themes and interpret the data critically. The interview audio recordings were transcribed, organised and categorised into specific themes to follow the systematic analysis. In particular, an inductive coding scheme helped identify several codes and then find major themes based on the initial codes. Then, we presented the analysis of data into the themes.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of findings is presented into three themes that emerged from the data: teachers' experience of insults, impudence and threats on social media, sexual approach to teachers, humiliation and mental disturbance and coping mechanisms against bullying.

Insults, Impudence and Threats on Social Media

It was revealed from the interviews that the twenty teachers, who participated in this research, mostly used Facebook Messenger to interact with their students. Participants shared that at some point of their teaching career, they had experienced face-to-face bullying in various forms such as unacceptable name-calling, repetitive insolence, disruptive behaviours (not listening, ignoring, throwing objects), making offensive gestures (staring, giggling) and noises, repeated lying and unjust disparagement of the teacher's professional skills. Some experienced being cyberbullied in many ways such as getting repetitive abusive and insulting messages, their reputation being damaged by spreading lies about them, trolling manipulated content about them, hacking their Facebook, getting unethical requests and sexual aggravation, sabotaging their publicly shared documents and circulating videos by mimicking them. They reported what they heard about their fellow teachers' experiences of bullying. Although all the participants responded that their students interacted with them on social media for educational as well as personal purposes, two participants involved in this study also expressed their annoyance to some of their students' forcing messages by asking them to share confidential information, particularly about exam questions.

They often ask for sample questions […] through Facebook Messenger. And some even ask […] at the eleventh hour […] requesting disclosure of some questions. […] they want everything to be cleared […] a bit disrespectful and irritating. […] I guess it is a form of cyberbullying because they keep on messaging you and ignore your circumstances. (Badal, Arohan School)

When it is exam season time, they start searching […] and messaging me which is irritating as it disturbs my other works. So, it is also a form of cyberbullying to me. (Akansha, Birat School)

Both Badal and Akansha voiced their aggression towards students' unethical behaviour to them which probably created a kind of threat to them and fear on their minds. Their repeated emphasis on students' discipline indicated that their students found social media as accessible and safer modes to disturb their teachers whenever they wanted. It finds resonance in the findings of Tolentino (2016) in the Philippines who found that students often used Facebook to bully their teachers against the punishments given to them. Macaulay et al. (2018) argue that students usually choose Facebook to humiliate their teachers in the public as revenge for the disappointment from their teachers. Students' bullying behaviours keep teachers in a traumatic situation and reduce their work efficiency when they had to work under stress, fear and frustration (Dolev-Cohen & Levkovich, 2020). It indicates how teachers are unsafe in their profession and become victims of cyberbullying in the growing use of social media such as Facebook. Also, it provides a picture of insecurity for teachers and the absence of effective cyber law to protect teachers. However, these experiences are minor forms of cyberbullying on the teachers as there were not any serious impacts on them. Rohit, at Vocational Technical School, reported another kind of cyberbullying, as he said:

A student was absent in the exam, but a teacher mistakenly gave a grade to him. I came to know about it, and I talked […] about it in the Messenger […]. The student took a screenshot and trolled me on a student FB page […] portrayed me responsible for making him pass an exam where he was absent. After 3 years, I experienced the same. It was closing time. Students wanted to conduct a farewell program […]. I suggested they postpone the program through Messenger. But the students made a troll […] 'Rohit Sir is against our love' and even tagged me […].

Both of his bitter experiences reflected his distress towards the willful and manipulative harm inflicted by his students on him through social networking sites that made the consequences even more severe and far-reaching than those of face-to-face bullying. Participants in this study reported the longevity and rapidity of humiliation they got from bullying content shared on social media which gave them more traumatic experiences than face-to-face bullying. Although Boulton et al. (2014) reported face-to-face bullying being pertinently more than cyberbullying, the impacts of the latter one have been found much worse than the previous one. It indicates students' lack of awareness of

digital literacy. It suggests that the increasing use of social media, for example, Facebook and Twitter, in countries such as Nepal where the majority of people have a low level of digital literacy can increase cyberbullying. Although the pain caused by cyberbullying is invisible, they are more harmful and long-lasting as digital information can be easily and quickly copied, shared, disseminated and manipulated. Teachers are bullied not only in an informal situation but also in formal online classes. Some male participants in this study also reported being cyberbullied. For example, Kartik at Buddha Medical College shared his humiliating experiences in his online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> This is my first experience […]. I am putting in so much effort. But […] most […] come for time pass. Some start sleeping, some […] laughing, some pay no attention and some […] even play with the slides of my presentation. It is embarrassing.

Kartik's expression reflected a kind of aggression towards the misconduct of his students making all his efforts futile. His repeated emphasis on such misbehaviours indicated how the students' attitude to undermining teachers can diminish their self-efficacy. In further conversation, he shared that apart from this experience, he sometimes felt humiliated and annoyed when his students kept on commenting, liking, sending love emojis, posting and tagging him and sometimes even asking about his marriage date on his frequent posts.

This emulated a view that teachers have difficulties in identifying the problem of cyberbullying. When they do, they find problems in managing them. In particular, when they do not find any source of help to overcome such problems, they are forced to survive with increasing frustration. Consistent with the findings of Dolev-Cohen and Levkovich (2020) in a different international context, teachers in this study, when they could not find a reliable source of help to overcome the stress of bullying, chose to bear trauma.

Cyberbullying by teenage students through Facebook Messenger emulated humiliation and mental disturbances on the mind of teachers ensuing in the loss of a sense of efficacy, confidence, job satisfaction and self-esteem, and increment of self-aversion, anxiety, stress, fear and tension. Teachers' loss of confidence due to their students' bullying behaviour through Facebook Messenger finds resonance in earlier studies (Burns et al., 2020; Kopecky & Szotkowski, 2017) in different contexts, which reported that students' bullying activities on social media resulted in the loss of teachers' concentration, the rise of their stress and poor performance. Similarly, further insights on bullying that generated a feeling of helplessness, uselessness and ineffectiveness in the mind of teachers are consistent with the existing literature (Mishna et al., 2020). However, none of the participants in the present study reported having a major depressive disorder, taking anxiety medicines or sleeping pills as reported in De Wet (2019). Besides, they reported the lack of helping hands in the situation when they were undergoing traumatic situations caused by students' cyberbullying behaviours through personal Facebook wall and chatbox. They complained that in the absence of strict disciplinary as well as legal action against cyberbullying, the increasing trend of cyberbullying could result in unexpected incidents. It indicates a kind of professional threat for teachers who may eventually leave their teaching profession.

Sexual Approach to Female Teachers

The cyberbullying experienced by the participants of this study is not just restricted to only one form. Some of the participants' expressions reflected how they learned about diverse cyberbullying activities. For example, Sambhavi, a participant from Eastern School, shared:

> After teaching for 2-3 years, they start saying, 'We do not want to address you as mam,' and start sending messages as 'Dear Sambhavi.' They even harassed me by proposing to me through social media because I was single.

She expressed her anger towards the sexual advances made by male students towards their female teachers that could create an uncomfortable learning environment. Her constant emphasis on the necessity of drawing a line between a teacher and student evoked a sense that male students often tend to forget being a student and misjudge a teacher's friendly nature to some signals of sexual advancements. In further conversations, she also shared her disappointment towards the administrative failure to acknowledge such sensitive issues. In such situations, she shared that many young female teachers reduced their interaction on social media to be safe from more vulnerable situations. This became much clearer from her Facebook wall that she hardly replied to any of her students' comments on her posts. So, this indicates how young male students sexually harass their female teachers when their female teachers are young and single. Moreover, this study also accentuated a wide array of various forms of teachers' experiences of cyberbullying, particularly those that were not acknowledged in the earlier studies (Cilliers & Chinyamurindi, 2020; Eden et al., 2013; Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016). These include illogical requests for the revelation of confidential data of assessment by students, unwanted sexual advances made by students and male co-workers, refusal to cooperate in the online classes, disrupting online contents and mimicking of teachers' communication styles and circulating them in the fake accounts. In particular, female teachers, who were young and unmarried, were more vulnerable than those male teachers to unwanted sexual advances by students and colleagues.

Especially early-career young and less experienced teachers are potentially vulnerable to cyberbullying (Macaulay et al., 2020). Female teachers further shared that they were frequently subjected to unwanted sexual advances by students. They also shared bitter experiences of being sexually harassed by their male co-workers. For example, Ambika at Devaki School shared:

> Some students cross their lines and interact with me in a flirty way. They tease their female teachers […]. Not just students but also some unmarried co-workers harass me […] through Messenger […].

Her expressions reflected her anguish towards the sexual offences made by students and colleagues to her which probably created a threat in her and made her feel unsafe. It was evident from her Facebook wall that she had frequent posts about various social issues and also shared her pictures in different attires and gestures inviting many likes and comments from her students and colleagues. Thus, the numerous cyberbullying experiences shared by the teachers in this study give acumens of different types of cyberbullying in practice. The findings, albeit they may not be generalisable, suggests that there is an increasing tendency of using social media for harassing teachers which resonates with the earlier findings in different international contexts (Carvalho et al., 2020; Legg & Wilson, 2012). As Bates (2014) asserts, teachers' silence is a major factor to allow students to rejoice in sexual harassment on social media. In addition, teachers' disregard of students' cyberbullying activities can escalate their bullying behaviours (Ellemers et al., 2012). It was evident from the interviews that the participants in this study, who were victims of cyberbullying, reduced their social interactions as a defensive measure. Although Ambika seemed to realise she was cyberbullied, she probably did not limit her social interactions. Instead, she continued her normal activities allowing others to comment on her Facebook wall. Her exposure on Facebook indicated that teachers were also responsible for being bullied by their youth students. Her account affirms a previous study that reports young boys' practice of sexual harassment on young female teachers to show they are grown up (Robinson, 2000). Similarly, Sujata at Raniban School reluctantly reported her experience of being sexually harassed on social media in a more aggressive format than the previous ones. She shared:

> After 4 years of leaving school, one of them messaged me through Messenger […] 'You are my crush.' I was shocked […] and tried to counsel him […]. He started to use vulgar and negative words on me.

Her comments indicated that especially female teachers are prone to cyberbullying. This informs us about the fact that different types of cyberbullying take place beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of school that are more challenging to regulate and control.

Humiliation and Mental Disturbance

In the interviews, all the teachers agreed that cyberbullying can have a devastating effect and the impacts can be even more severe due to its fast and wider reach compared to face-to-face bullying. All the participants identified various reasons why the teachers are targeted by their students. However, humiliation and mental disturbance were agreed as the major impacts of cyberbullying. When they were asked about how they felt after being bullied, most of them responded that it brought a sense of humiliation and fear in them. Also, they shared that the feeling of possible negative evaluation by others and constant mental disturbance impacted their self-efficacy and output in professional and personal spaces.

> She was mentally disturbed […] developed a fear about her social status […] brought questions to her credibility towards work. (Sarita, Bagmati Higher Secondary School)
> Sometimes such humiliation follows me. Their expressions keep on haunting me. […] not able to concentrate on my work. […] psychologically affected […]. (Sarala, Bagmati Higher Secondary School)
> I tried to find the reasons behind such activities. Was it because of me? […] the question hung over my head. I was not able to complete […] task properly. I was nervous and mentally disturbed. (Binita, TT College)

These teachers' expressions reflected a kind of aggression followed by tension, fear, stress, nervousness, concentration disorders (i.e. unable to concentrate on a particular idea) and self-aversions. These comments provided a clear picture of how bullying has a pessimistic effect on teachers' reputations causing them to feel devalued, discouraged, unappreciated and dejected. For example, Akansha at Birat School expressed trepidation about returning to the class, as she shared, 'I did not feel like going back to that class again'. Her expression reflected how bullying experiences demolish teachers' self-assurance ultimately resulting in the loss of confidence and motivation to teach and get job satisfaction. It finds a resonance in the findings of Variyan and Wilkinson (2021) who report that bullying on teachers usually leads them to mental sufferings such as anxiety and depression. The victims of cyberbullying lose their work efficiency when they are stressed (Barak, 2005). Rohit, at Vocational Technical School, echoed that bullying experiences diminished his credibility as a person who could deal with bullying in school. He felt anxious, frustrated and demoralised after being bullied, as he shared:

I was haunted by a feeling what my co-workers, other students and their parents might have thought […] felt humiliated […] annoyed. […] was ashamed of facing people. When they giggled […] felt like they were giggling at me. […] thinking changed […]. Sometimes the flashbacks of these bullying incidents still put me under pressure.

His comments induced a sense that bullying experiences create mistrust in others, increase insecurity in themselves and lead to poor social adjustments. This view was supported by Sujata, at Raniban School, that such experiences resulted in feelings of helplessness, loneliness, worthlessness and alienation eventually damaging mental health. Although none of the participants reported about physical bullying of severe formats such as students kicking their teachers, punching them, stealing and vandalising their property, blackmailing and giving life threats with weapons similar to the findings reported by De Wet (2010), teenage students' cyberbullying activities in this study increased teachers' feeling of insecurity. Overall, findings in this section suggest that bullying often generates humiliation and mental disturbance in teachers. It is, therefore, essential to educate everyone including students, teachers and parents to make them aware of social media and any form and medium of bullying activities.

Coping Mechanisms Against Bullying

There is no hard and fast rule in dealing with bullying issues. However, it was revealed in this study that the victims adopted several coping mechanisms against bullying activities. Interviews with the participants revealed that they shared their experiences of bullying behaviours with family and friends and applied the resistance strategy of seeking emotional and psychological support from them against bullying behaviours. For example:

I shared this problem with my husband and my sister […]. They comforted me by saying that these types of things keep on happening […]. It helped heal me at some level. (Sujata, Raniban School)
I took the help of my friends. I shared […] with my friends and they also shared one or two such bitter experiences of cyberbullying […]. I also shared it with my family members. After sharing, I felt a bit relieved. (Rohit, Vocational Technical School)

Both Sujata and Rohit's expressions reflected that support from family and friends helped them reduce the anxiety caused by cyberbullying. In the continued interviews, they shared their lack of knowledge that they were unaware of the reporting mechanism and getting official help to prevent such cyberbullying behaviours. Most of the bullied participants

relied on sharing their distress with their family members, colleagues and relatives, particularly the people they trusted to get rid of the pain inflicted by such activities. However, none of the participants reported their consultation with any professional counsellor probably due to the adverse attitude still present towards such culture in our society. Seeking help from colleagues, parents and other sources to overcome the problems of cyberbullying (Clark & Bussey, 2020) to some extent made them resilient. However, the idea would not be much helpful for teachers when the parents of students, who bully teachers, ignore the issues as some participants in this study reported. In this complicated situation, teachers who are victims of cyberbullying can become resilient through the collaborative efforts of intimate colleagues and administration (Kopecky & Szotkowski, 2017). Moreover, some participants in the interviews also expressed that they confronted bullying behaviours and gained resilience. As Binita, at TT College, shared,

I kept on telling myself that I have to do it; I can do it. I took it normally […]. You should not just let yourself down […] have that confidence. Then I easily did that.

Her expression reflected the strategy of being resilient to deal with bullying behaviours. Similarly, other participants, for example, Sarala and Birat, handled the problem at the personal level without making it an official issue.

I first try to calm them. You have to learn to handle them yourself. Nobody will help you […] give them advice […]. I try to understand and think about students, their problems, family background […] just finally forgive them and move on. (Sarala, Bagmati Higher Secondary School)
I feel that teachers never get credit […] should prepare themselves for these reactions in advance […] be ready to make adjustments […] should learn to forgive. (Birat, Devkota Academy)

These comments indicate that, although teachers are vulnerable to cyberbullying, they can tolerate it and have compassion for their students. They affirm a previous study (Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012a) which reports that teachers bullied by their students often become considerate and suffer much worse in due course. At the same time, these comments indicate their lack of awareness of cyber law. In our continued interview, they shared their frustration that while principals were familiar with teachers' problems of cyberbullying, they intended to hold students at their schools despite their indiscipline and fail to address bullying activities targeted towards teachers. In the words of Variyan and Wilkinson (2021), administrators especially in private schools who prioritise their business often ignore teachers' issues such as gender discrimination and cyberbullying, and keep them under stress. Rohit, a victim of cyberbullying, suggested:

I suggest all the teachers filter their friend lists and be careful about the use of language while interacting with students.

His expression reflected his awareness of the impacts of cyberbullying. His comment also indicates that in the absence of administrative support, teachers need to explore and apply preventive strategies to be safe from potential cyberbullying behaviours. From the observation of his Facebook wall, it was evident that while his experiences taught him the ways to handle social media, he never replied to any comments on his Facebook and completely ignored sharing digital information. Learning to handle the technology particularly Facebook to avoid cyberbullying was another coping mechanism adopted by teachers to retaliate against cyberbullying. In particular, teachers' strategy of ignoring the abusive message from students and deactivating their Facebook account helped them stay safe from a worse situation of cyberbullying. Their ideas which they learned from the experiences of using Facebook and other social media find a resonance in the findings of Cilliers and Chinyamurindi (2020) that high-level experience with social media eases to deal with cyberbullying. However, Sambhavi at Eastern School suggested:

Teachers can change the workplace. It is not necessary to stay in the same place for a long time if such harassing things keep on repeating.

Her expression reflected that changing the workplace sometimes can help victims of cyberbullying minimise their psychological stress because they do not need to face such a bully again. One of her female colleagues also applied the same strategy to get rid of such a problem. However, some participants, for example, Ambika and Safal, strongly argued that avoiding and ignoring cyberbullying cannot always work as it can lead to other serious consequences.

The management should be strong. If there is no punishment, students will repeatedly try to bully their teachers. They should be made aware of the boundaries they should follow. (Ambika, Devaki School)
There is the necessity of implementation of Strict rules and regulations should be implemented to prevent cyberbullying and ensure safety. (Safal, Ambience Boarding School)

These comments affirm a previous study (Koirala, 2020) which argues that, although deactivating the Facebook account and ignoring students' bully in the absence of strict cyber law can give short-term relief to teachers, it is unlikely to minimise students' bullying behaviours. Along with the implementation part, other participants of this study also echoed their voices regarding the role of parents in educating their children. For example, Bhawana at Bagmati Higher Secondary School said, 'Parents should also teach their children about social discipline and offence'. Bhawana's comment indicated that only teachers' voices would not be strong enough to deal with bullying issues where they needed collective support from parents and administration.

It provides a clear picture of what exactly teachers expected from their administration and parents to educate children about the responsible use of internet facilities. Similarly, some participants suggested that it is essential to train teachers to deal with bullying activities. In the words of Macaulay et al. (2018), providing teachers with essential training for increasing knowledge of coping with bullying and implementing strict policies from the organisations such as schools, colleges and other government agencies along with the parental backing against bullying might enable teachers to deal with and prevent students' cyberbullying behaviours. Also, the teachers in this study suggested school administration monitor students' behaviours, especially on social media, to prevent cyberbullying. The necessity of organisational and government policy in dictating cyberbullying as a serious offence was also felt by the participants. Findings indicate the need for various coping mechanisms against bullying to help teachers and students grow and interact in a safe learning environment. However, the teachers neither followed legal actions against bullying nor officialise their students' misconduct. None of the teachers in this study used alcohol or tobacco or drug as a mechanism for coping with cyberbullying as reported in Carvalho et al. (2020). Although teachers were aware of various forms of cyberbullying happening with their colleagues, they were unaware of legal treatment against cyberbullying.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have widened our understanding of multiple forms of cyberbullying that the teachers in this study experienced, their adverse impressions and the common ways of coping with bullying behaviours. This study investigated how students misuse social media, particularly Facebook, one of the most common social networking sites in Nepal, for harassing their teachers by maintaining anonymity, giving quick access to the audience with just a click, and the distance factor for any possible immediate punishments. Such a tendency is found to be escalating in the context of Nepal. The lack of acknowledgement of the graveness of the issue by an academic organisation, parents, teachers and government bodies seems to escalate cyberbullying in the context of increasing use of social media. In developing countries such as Nepal, there are laws, in general, to take a holistic approach to the problem of cybercrimes but are barely enforced sternly when it is precisely meant for teachers. Not much has been done to secure teachers from the adverse impacts of cyberbullying.

The longevity of humiliation generated from social media depends on how sensitive the content is associated with an individual's character. Such harassing activities tamper even the efficacy of skilled teachers making them demotivated towards their profession. No action against such a culture means elevating such practices and demoralising the educators by impeding constructive academic outcomes. Although individual coping strategies are applied by the victims, the findings strongly urge for resilient coordination between all the stakeholders (learners, educators, parents, academic organisations and policymakers) to raise awareness about the issue, the difficulties faced by teachers and the ways to intervene and minimise cyberbullying.

Limitations

Because this study was based on online interviews with teachers and observation of their Facebook wall, there might be lapses in information sharing in the virtual environment. Face-to-face interviews would help us gather more thick descriptions. We developed an interview schedule and used it to conduct interviews. A standardised interview schedule would help us conduct interviews in a more structured way.

Recommendation for Future Study

Future studies can analyse policy provisions and implementation to suggest the development of strict cyber laws and robust implications for the actualisation of zero tolerance. In addition, the role of social environment, students' digital literacy and administrators' awareness of cyberbullying in the increment of cyberbullying can be other areas for further studies.

Availability of Data and Material Available upon request.

Code Availability Available upon request.

Declarations

Ethics Approval We obtained ethical approval from Social Science and Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (SSERHEC) at Nepal Open University and informed consent from participants.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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