Cyberbullying, an overlooked and ever growing danger to the development of children

A Report from KidsRights

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Introduction:

According to Internet Live Stats, part of the Real Time Statistics Project, it is estimated that as of the October 2020 the number of Internet users worldwide was near to 4.7 billion, roughly 56% of the world's population. In 1995 that figure was only about one percent of the world's population. From 1999 to 2013, the number of Internet users has increased tenfold. As Internet access becomes increasingly accessible and affordable through a range of devices, the digital environment becomes an even bigger part of the lives of many people across the globe. In Europe 80%, in the Americas 75%, in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) 78%, in the Arab States, Asia, and Pacific 40% and in Africa 25% of the population is online. According to an investigation by Research estimated that out of all Internet users worldwide, an estimated one third are children. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) defined broadly are reshaping children's lives. Having access to the Internet is becoming more crucial for both rich and poor households. In many developed countries children are growing up with multiple digital devices in their homes, for both schoolwork and personal use. They enjoy the use of easy to access computers or tablets at school or at home to provide their first port of call for information, learning, games or communication with distant friends. Having been raised surrounded with digital devices, children in high-income countries take having access to the Internet as granted, up the point where it is difficult to live without them. When it comes to less developed countries, as the World Bank in 2016 starkly observed, "out of the poorest 20 percent of households in the world, nearly 7 out of 10 have a mobile phone. The poorest households are more likely to have access to mobile phones than to toilets or clean water." With the rise of further set of socio-technological innovations including digital wearable's, smart homes and cities and more it is becoming clearer that the future will be more digital, not less and missing out on those trends would mean to remain poor and marginalized, especially when it comes to children.

In middle or high school most of us would have experienced being bullied or witness others being bullied. With the rise of the digital age a bigger part of our lives takes place online, for example through social media. Unfortunately as societies adapt, so does bullying which now also takes online. The term used to describe this is "cyberbullying." It is easy to describe as cyberbullying as "bullying, but online," however in reality digital technologies ensure that cyberbullying is far more severe in scope and the potential harm it can create. Despite this cyberbullying is often overlooked or underestimated. Throughout this report the concept of cyberbullying will be defined and examined, how its existence violated the fundamental rights of the children and potential actions to combat it will be reviewed.

Chapter 1: Impacts and scope of cyberbullying among children

1.1:   Defining cyberbullying?

Bullying has existed long before the existence of the Internet. Bullying was damaging enough prior to the Internet, however with children's lives having become more digital, the Internet has only magnified the harms and the methods of bullying towards children. Cyberbullying enables perpetrators to do extreme harm to their victims that would never be possible when it comes to regular bullying. While no official legal definition of cyberbullying exist, a common used definition for cyberbullying, one that KidsRights will use defines the act as bullying or harassment that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about the victim in question. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment, blackmail, exploitation or humiliation. Some acts of cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior. Cyberbullying occurs most frequently in Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok, Text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices. Other places where cyberbullying occurs frequent include instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the Internet, online forums, chat rooms, and message boards, such as Reddit and online gaming communities.

The far reach of the Internet allows one's humiliation at the hands of a bully to spread out across cyberspace. While only a handful of peers might witness a traditional school bullying incident, YouTube and digital cameras make the spread of humiliation available to a much wider audience, in some cases reaching between dozens to hundreds of thousands of people. Compared to regular bullying, this exposure is limited to only those who present at the time the bullying occurred. It is widely thought that the severity of bullying is worse now that it extends online as well as offline, at home as well as at school. The psychological impact of cyber bullying is often more traumatizing than physical bullying because of the extreme public nature of the bullying. Online exposure means that the whole world can witness the victim's humiliation.

Since children spend a lot of time on their mobile phones and in cyber space, cyber-bullying can happen 24 hours a day, and the victim may feel that there is no way to escape it. It is not possible to walk away from bullying online. Popular anti-bullying programs advocate children to 'walk away from the bullies' or 'tell them to stop'. However when the perpetrators are online this is not possible. They can follow their victims anywhere they go, even if they are not online. There have even been cases of cyberbullying where a victim was re-victimized

after moving towns as a result of the humiliation endured. In many cases the bullied victim does not even know who is hurting them. The Internet grants users that aim to hurt others a lot of anonymity to hide behind. Anonymity also helps remove the power imbalance so that anyone can be a bully. This makes the victim feel even more helpless, because they do not know the source of the attacks. Technology also makes tracing the source of the attacks nearly impossible. Before a victim finds out the identity of the bully, the information could have spread to a worldwide audience hurting a child considerably.

High profile cases of children suffering from cyberbullying are plentiful. These cases perfectly illustrate how cyberbullying can be far more severe and dangerous to a child's wellbeing than regular bullying. Take for example the case of a Canadian teenager who for the sake of privacy the report we will refer to as A., who committed suicide after suffering years of bullying both in school and on the Internet. When she was in seventh grade, she and her friends would use the Internet to meet people. On one occasion she was convinced to show her breasts on a webcam to a stranger, who took a screenshot of it and one year later contacted her through Facebook and threatened to expose the picture, unless she "put on a show" for him, implying she performs a sexual act. He eventually did release the photo. A. wrote about her experiences before her death, revealing that she experienced anxiety, depression, and panic disorder due to having been sexually exploited online and cyberbullied. Her family moved to a new home in an attempt to give her a fresh start, where A. later said she began using alcohol and other drugs as a result of the emotional toll. A year later, A.'s blackmailer reappeared, creating a Facebook profile that used the topless photo as its profile image and contacting classmates at her new school. Again, A. was faced a lot of emotional stress as a result from the humiliation and the responses of her peers, eventually changing schools for a second time. According to A.'s mother, "Every time she moved schools he would go undercover and become a Facebook friend. What the guy did was he went online to the kids who went to the new school and said that he was going to be a new student, that he was starting school the following week and that he wanted some friends and could they friend him on Facebook. He eventually gathered people's names and sent A.'s video to her new school." With A.'s mental state worsening, she began to engage in self-mutilation and cutting. Sadly on October 10th 2012, A. was found dead at her home, having hanged herself. A. could not escape a photo taken as a screenshot during a webcast that she could not control. Two years later and individual was accused and charged for cyberbullying her. A very shocking and crucial fact to know is that the individual that followed and hurt A. was not a fellow Canadian who personally knew her. Instead it was a man living in the Netherlands that is believed to be responsible for A.'s torment. As of this moment, the accused man has not been tried yet due to bureaucracy issues involving his extradition to Canada from the Netherlands. This case is an important indicator why

cyberbullying is so dangerous to children. An individual living in another continent was able to torment and stalk A. and use the every expanding digitalization of children's lives

1.2:   Impacts of cyberbullying

With the increased cruelty of cyberbullying, compared to traditional bullying comes a deeper impact to the children involved. The effects of cyberbullying are in many ways worse than traditional bullying, infiltrating every part of a victim's life and causing psychological struggles and in some cases result in physical harm or suicide. According to studies by WebMD, victims of cyberbullying can have lasting emotional, concentration and behavioral issues. These problems may bleed into their social lives, as they encounter more trouble getting along with others. They experience trust issues and are more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs at an earlier age.

Bullying in both its physical or digital form can have lasting psychological effects on children. For instance, bullied children are more likely to be anxious and to think about committing suicide. The problems are not only psychological and emotional, but also harm the bullied child physically. In a study of Dutch schoolchildren aged nine to twelve, researchers found that bullied children were "approximately three times as likely to experience headaches, feel listless and wet their beds." Studies have shown that the effects lasted into adulthood, with one study finding that male young adults who were bullied in high school were likely to suffer from low self-esteem and depression even a decade after the bullying had ended.

A study conducted by Ipsos in 2019 found teens that were cyberbullied were also more likely to suffer from poor sleep and depression. This finding was echoed in Ditch the Label's 2019 report, in which 45% of respondents reported feeling depressed. Being bullied can lead to a lifetime of low self-esteem. This may cause chronic fatigue, insomnia and poor performance in school or at work. Poor sleep and depression create or worsen other problems to a child's future and their wellbeing, for example their performance in schools, which in return hurts their future career prospects. Having poor results in school and as a result poor career prospects is also likely to lead to or worsen depression. It's a downwards spiral for children which might have been avoided had the child not been cyberbullied or receive proper assistance in handling. TechJury statistics did an investigation into the effects Cyberbullying finding that victims of cyberbullying are 1.9 times more likely to commit suicide. This is primarily due to the depression the victims experience as a result of the cyberbullying and the

feeling of powerlessness due to being unable to stop the cyberbullying. TechJury statistics found that 66% of victims have feelings of powerlessness. Other significant psychological impacts for victims of cyberbullying include loss of sleep and lower self-esteem, which 63% and 61% of the victims of cyberbullying experience respectively.

Perpetrators of cyberbullying get to operate outside the view of adults making it harder for parents to recognize and address it, if and when their kids are being victimized. Victims of cyber-bullying may be reluctant to report the bullying for fear that their mobile phones may be taken away or their Internet access suspended. Combine this with the fact that parents frequently lack knowledge on the usage of Internet including cyberbullying. This further enhances the mind-set that children who are cyberbullied can't turn to parents for support, further worsening the feelings on isolation often worsening existing depression. TechJury statistics found that only 38% of cyberbullying victims are willing to admit it to their parents

1.3:   The scope of cyberbullying

Having examined the consequences of cyberbullying it is important to identify the scope of the problem. As Internet usage among children continues to expand, especially in developing countries, more and more children are vulnerable to cyberbullying and its effects.

Ipsos Global Advisor study, carried out in 28 countries in 2018 investigated cyberbullying among children. It found among others that the percentage of parents who reported having a child or knowing a child in their community who has experienced cyberbullying has increased globally since 2011. Around 33% of parents of a child aged between 12 and 17 years old reported having a child or knowing a child in their community who had been cyberbullied. This was up from 26% from an earlier investigation back in 2011. Among the countries surveyed, South Africa shows the highest prevalence of cyberbullying, based on 54% of South African parents who have or know of a child in their community who has been the victim of cyberbullying, up 24% from 2011. 65% of parents of a child or those who know of a child in their community who had been cyberbullied report the harassing behavior takes place on social networking sites. On a regional basis, Latin America experiences the highest amount of cyberbullying on social media platforms with 76% of parents of a child or those who know of a child in their community that has been cyberbullied The Asia-Pacific region experiences the lowest amount of cyberbullying on social networking sites, with 53% of parents of a child or those who know of a child in their community who had been cyberbullied

In 2019 the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence against Children conducted a poll in 30 countries including Albania, Bangladesh, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, France, Gambia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Moldova, Montenegro, Myanmar, Nigeria, Romania, Sierra Leone, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. In this poll they asked more than 170,000 people aged between 13 and 24 years old. One in three of the surveyed young people said they had been a victim of online bullying, with one in five reporting having skipped school as a result of the cyberbullying.

An common mistake some people make regarding cyberbullying is assuming that it is a uniquely high-income issue The UNICEF and SRSG poll results challenged this belief that cyberbullying is a uniquely high-income issue. The UNICEF poll found that 34% of respondents in sub-Saharan Africa said they had been a victim of cyberbullying and some 39% said they knew about private online groups inside the school community, where children share information about peers for the purpose of bullying. As stated earlier according to an IPSOS report, South Africa currently has the highest prevalence of cyberbullying, with 54% of the surveyed parents replying that they were aware that their child or a child in their community had been a victim of cyberbullying. South African is a vastly different country compared to the more developed European countries. Despite this cyberbullying occurs frequently in South Africa and similar countries. The growth of Internet in people's daily lives occurred earlier in developed countries, then in developing countries. As this is quite a new development in a legal sense, South Africa and many other similar African countries do not have specific legislation that deals with cyberbullying. This would explain why the cyberbullying number in developing countries is able to get higher than many developed countries.

A 2018 Pew Research study found that a 59% of minors in the US experienced some form of cyberbullying. According to the study, both online harassment and cyberbullying occur at particularly high rates. The most common specific types of cyberbullying teens experience include offensive name-calling, which 42% have said to be a victim of, spreading of false rumours, which 32% have said to be a victim of, receiving explicit images they didn't ask for, which 25% have said to be a victim of, receiving physical threats, which 16% have said to be a victim of and having explicit images shared without their consent, which 7% have said to be a victim of.

When trying to determine the true scope of cyberbullying an important obstacle needs to be addressed. Even very young children under the age of 13 experience cyberbullying. According to a survey conducted by 'Comparitech,' 47.7% of

parents with children ages 6-10 reported their children were bullied. Comparing this with older children 56.4% of parents with children ages 11-13 reported their children were bullied and 59.9% of parents with children ages 14-18 reported their children were bullied. Children under the age of 13 are active on the Internet especially on social media. Ofcom's Children and Parents Media Use and Attitudes report found that in the UK 46% of 11-year-olds, 51% of 12-year-olds and 28% of 10-year-olds now have a social media account, despite the minimum age requirement being 13 years old according to terms of service of many social media giants. If we assume other countries have similar numbers we are talking about a very large number of children whop are online and with this vulnerable to cyberbullying. An investigation by the 'Children's Society' found that 61% of young people now older than 13 years had their first social account at age 12 or under. In many cases parents are not aware their child is active on social media and therefore might also not be aware if their child experiences cyberbullying. The child could decide to not inform his or her parents of the problem out of fear to have their access to their social media or Internet being revoked. This leaves very young children more vulnerable to cyberbullying since they have less experience and knowledge on how to deal with cyberbullying, in addition to having fewer options to report and seek help. Since technically it goes against the terms of service for a child under 13 years to have a social media account, when determining the scope of cyberbullying the number of victims under 13 years old are being underreported. It is very difficult to accurately determine by how much this group is underreported.

Chapter 2: Cyberbullying and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Internet makes it easier for bad actors to harass and offend others. Cyberbullying is a threat to children's rights provided for by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 19 of the UNCRC grants children the right to "appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2011 elaborated on Article 19 UNCRC to include psychological bullying and hazing by adults and other children, as well as acts committed via information and communication technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet. The Internet can be an exciting place for children and teenagers because they are able to adopt different identities and interact away from adult supervision. Yet this same autonomy also makes the Internet dangerous. Just as teenagers can create personas that are different from their real world identity, so can sexual predators and cyberbullies. The anonymity of the Internet enables bad actors to create false identities on social networking sites and potentially harm other users.

Bullying and cyber-bullying is harmful to a child, with the effects lasting into adulthood, in addition to harms the child experiences in the short term. Taking this into account it is clear that bullying as a whole, be it online or offline is harmful to the child's psychological and emotional health. Despite this bullying is not mentioned once in the UNCRC. This however does not mean that children don't have a right to not be bullied. Bullying affects the development of a child. The right to development is provided in article 6 UNCRC, which obliges states to "ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." A child's development can be defined as the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth the reaching of adulthood. Bullying in all it forms impacts the psychological and emotional development of children. Therefore through article 6, the UNCRC grants children the right to develop to their best potential and through this be protected against bullying.

Shutting oneself out of the Internet or social media is not an ideal solution. This is because the Internet has also been crucial in the fulfilment of other children's rights. The digital age has also supported the rights of the UNCRC and their fulfilment in practice. One of such rights is the right to an education provided for in article 28 UNCRC. The Internet provides remarkable opportunities for

children's development and learning, allowing them access to new sources of knowledge and broadened experiences. The Internet can enhance children's developmental and learning opportunities. Before the Internet the main source of education outside their parents was education at school, varying in quality depending on location and libraries, which not every child had access to. Additionally the information that a child could acquire was limited to what the schools curriculum offered and what books where available in each individual library. With the rise of the Internet, children have gained access to a massive library of knowledge. For all topics information can be found on the internet, even those topics that might be sensitive or controversial, such as sex education and religions or information that without the internet would never have reached them, such as certain world news, especially events that take place on different continents. Children need access to a good-quality, accurate and timely circulation of information, as is it vital to their schoolwork and their learning capacities. The wide range of activities in the Internet may enhance the development of writing, reading and math skills amongst young children. Additionally the Internet offers education platforms and programs that assist any special needs or learning issues a child might have. In some cases the Internet is the only place these children can find such platforms and programs, due to them not being provided by their schools. Another right children have that the Internet has assisted in the fulfilment the right to freedom of speech and expression. Social media, such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, make the Internet a tool for a broad range of communicative interactions. It has allowed those whose voices would not have been heard in the past to not only gain a national audience, but also a global audience. Without the digital age and the Internet, child activists and International Children Peace Prize winners like Greta Thunberg would never have reached an audience like the one she managed to reach since the start of her actions for a greener earth. Cyberbullying is a technical problem.

Chapter 3: Cyberbullying and the Corona Virus

As more and more children spend increasing more time on the Internet the risk of severe cyberbullying increases. This increasing trend has now been accelerated greatly as a result of the government responses in order to curb the spread of the Corona Virus. At the time of writing this report, November 2020, many countries in the world are currently facing their second Corona Virus wave and lockdown as a response. This often involves requiring children and young people to stay at home and minimize their social interaction. The people working at KidsRights have seen that this frequently involves banning certain social activities and pushing for digital lessons from schools. In the need for entertainment and interaction with peers, these children and young people are even more dependent and active on the Internet, especially on social media websites and entertainment websites, such as online gaming. Additionally the pressure of the restrictions as a result of the Corona Virus could result in some children and young people lashing out to others. It is therefore not surprising to see an increase in cyberbullying.

L1ght, formerly known AntiToxin Technologies is organization using AI to detect and filter harmful online content to protect children. The organization has developed technology that can detect and predict toxic content in online text, audio, videos, or images. "Toxic content" includes, and is not limited to cyberbullying, harmful content, hate speech, and predatory behavior. The algorithms involved were designed by a multidisciplinary team of cyber security experts, data scientists, psychologists and anthropologists. L1ght can read context and flag material that is specifically harmful to kids. The technology can also pick up on different nuances in textual exchanges, such as when teenagers are throwing 'fighting words' at one another while competing in a game, versus if one teenager is repeatedly victimizing another in a harassing manner. According to Forbes within the first quarter of its launch, L1ght made headlines for removing over 130K pedophiles from public groups on WhatsApp. During that same time period, the company convinced Google and Facebook to purge apps that were monetizing links to questionable WhatsApp groups and later Bing also removed underage porn from its search results as part of L1ght's recommendations. Having these achievements to its name L1ght is a reliable indicator to use to measure cyberbullying online. Today's technology used by many companies owning sites where cyberbullying takes place uses dictionary blacklists of forbidden words as a low-level way to have some degree of control over discussions online. Unfortunately this tracking method is not without its flaws, with many cases avoiding being spotted.

Throughout the peak of the first Corona Virus wave and lockdown, L1ght analyzed millions of websites, social networks, teen chatting forums, and gaming

sites across the world. During the period March to April 2020, when the lockdown was at its peak, with schools closed L1ght recorded a 70% increase in cyberbullying across millions of websites, social networks, teen chatting forums, and gaming sites across the world. They also found a 40% increase in toxicity on online gaming platforms and a 200% increase in traffic to hate sites. As schools reopened and measures aimed at curbing the spread of the virus where loosened the increase in cyberbullying likely decreased, but with the second wave currently arriving and many countries returning to the lockdown state we will most likely see another increase in cyberbullying, toxicity online and hate speech.

Chapter 4: Addressing Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a bigger danger to children's wellbeing then some of us are aware. It's a problem that needs to be addressed. In this chapter KidsRights will recommend and explain three potential solutions that would assist greatly in combatting cyberbullying and protecting children. These three solutions are firstly updating the UNCRC, secondly investing in apps and digital initiatives against cyberbullying and thirdly improving data collection on cyberbullying.

4.1:   Updating the UNCRC

Since the UNCRC's inception on 20 November 1989 new dangers towards children have arisen, which are not mentioned or recognized within the UNCRC. This creates a problem since without the recognition within the UNCRC or any other international human rights document, these dangers and social issues do not receive the same attention, recognition and monitoring from the UN committee on the rights of the child as they should. The UNCRC has three additional protocols, namely "The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and The Optional Protocol on a communications procedure," all of which where aimed to expand the UNCRC's influence. Modernizing the UNCRC by either rewriting certain rights or by adding a fourth optional protocol focused on the issue of cyberbullying would go a long way in recognizing the seriousness of the problem and encouraging states to take more measures to combat it. Recognizing cyber-bullying as a threat to the child's development and confirming such danger by providing the right to be protected from it within a revised UNCRC or with an additional protocol would give child protection organization's a stronger argument to push for state legislation that will grant children greater protection. Currently responsibility of protecting children from bullying taking place online is either placed upon schools, in cases where the bullying is between to classmates or parents in the case of the child facing bullying from an individual outside school. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2011 elaborated on Article 19 UNCRC to include psychological bullying and hazing by adults and other children committed via information and communication technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet. Article 19 UNCRC grants children protection from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation." There is no clear indication what type of measures should be taken by states. A common approach by states is to support schools and to a certain extend parents in protecting their children from cyber-bullying, following a similar approach when it comes to combatting traditional bullying. In practice however, neither schools nor parents are properly equipped or have the necessary knowledge to protect the child, resulting in the bullying to continue

unopposed. If it were possible for children to shut out harmful messages or block harmful content on the Internet that poses a risk to their development then cyberbullying would not be as a severe issue as it currently is. Despite the UNCRC being written before Internet even existed it has aged well since the beginning of the digital age. This does not mean it should not be improved. Rewriting the UNCRC or parts thereof in order to 'modernize' the convention in order to ensure that children are better protected from the dangers of the digital world, including cyberbullying, while at the same time safeguarding the benefits it brings to other rights, such as right to education and freedom of speech would assist children greatly when it comes to protecting them from cyberbullying, since this time they have a clear fundamental right to be protected from cyberbullying.

4.2:   Apps and digital initiatives against cyberbullying:

One of the major issues around cyberbullying is that children and young people don't report it to their parents or the police, especially when the cyberbullying takes extreme forms. Sometimes they are ashamed and are often afraid of the response of the parents and police. When they do report it, police often fail to take action, because they don't take complaints seriously enough or because they lack and understanding how cyberbullying exactly works and the impacts it has. Young girls are often too ashamed to reveal their online contacts to their parents, partially out of fear of an overprotective response such as taking phones and access to the Internet away or not being taken seriously. Ironically it are children, modern technologies, apps and the Internet itself, which might be the best people and tools available to combat cyberbullying. Small and large initiatives have or are appearing worldwide aimed at helping and protecting children from cyberbullying. Take for example "the Cyber Teens app," developed by the 17 year old teenager Sadat from Bangladesh. The app aims to encourage young people to report cyberbullying. Young people can use it to learn about Internet safety and to report their own cases of cyberbullying in confidentiality. Depending on the severity and the nature of the complaint, the case is either sent to a cyber specialist who can sort it out, to a social worker, or in the most serious cases to the local police. Sadat works closely with the local police to make sure they deal appropriately with complaints, giving children and young people also a voice within the complaint handling process. Initiatives like those undertaken by Sadat vary in size and scope, but still prove to be successful in some form. If one teenager in Bangladesh can create an app that has shown to be successful in practice image what a vast experienced team with proper resources are able to accomplish. This is something that should be encouraged.

As stated earlier, despite most major social media companies, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube and Instagram specify in their terms of service that users must be at least 13 years old to have an account, an investigation by the 'Children's Society' found that 61% of young people had a first account at age 12 or under. In many cases parents are not aware their child is active on social media and therefore might also not be aware if their child experiences cyberbullying. The child could decide to not inform his or her parents of the problem out of fear to have their access to their social media or Internet being revoked. This leaves very young children more vulnerable to cyberbullying since they have less experience and knowledge on how to deal with cyberbullying, in addition to having fewer options to report and seek help. Making improvements in this area would go a long way to help deal with the aftermath of cyberbullying. In an earlier recommendation we discussed the importance of having apps and programs on the Internet for combatting cyberbullying. We referred to "the Cyber Teens app," developed by Sadat from Bangladesh as an example for a solution to deal with perpetrators of cyberbullying. There is no reason why a similar approach would not work when it comes with dealing with the impacts of cyberbullying. Opening up channels, especially for very young children, where children can report and ask for help in dealing with the consequences of being cyberbullied, if necessary without getting parents involved, would enable involved actors to reduce the harm cyberbullying does. Since bullying has existed for a long time and will likely never disappear a good response is required in order to limit the harms cyberbullying does to its victims.

Using apps and programs on the Internet to help combat cyberbullying and its effects is ideal, there is one advantage the Internet provides that has to be taken advantage of. When it comes to the Internet the concept of distance is practically non-existent. While a man in the Netherlands could cyberbully a girl in Canada to the point of suicide due to the non-existent concept of distance, this problem might also be the key factor to combat cyberbullying in developing countries. Governments and parents in developing countries lack the experience and some cases the motivation to take measures to protect children from the harms they can experience on the Internet, prioritizing the economic benefits the Internet can provide. If on the Internet the concept of distance is practically non-existent, then in theory a effective measure to help children would be to open up contact channels, perhaps through an app or secured forum where cyberbullied children in developing countries can receive support and assistance from experienced people in developed countries providing forms of assistance that children would not receive by relevant actors and parties within their own country. Since cyberbullying is a global issue, one that could affect children regardless of their wealth status or location, the idea that fighting cyberbullying together using the benefits of the Internet should not be dismissed. While developed themselves

have room for improvement, they have more experience, better legislation and infrastructure in place to combat cyberbullying compared to developing countries. International cooperation and investment in apps and programs that would enable developed nations to assist children in developing nations should be encouraged to ensure that this idea is applied in practice.

4.3:   Improving data collection:

While those in the western world have enjoyed digital technologies and the Internet for around two decades now, reaching points where live without them seems impossible, for many third countries this has not been the case. Many third countries have only seen the introduction and expansion of the Internet in their country very recently, to the point an absence in infrastructure and legislation exists. To a certain extend this is understandable. These developing countries prioritize taking the economic benefits of having good Internet access over placing restrictions and protection measures in order to protect children from cyberbullying. This does make it difficult to get accurate data to determine the scope and severity of cyberbullying in developing countries where parents and schools often don't provide guidance on how to deal with cyberbullying, leaving children vulnerable and without support. Investing in programs that improve data collection regarding cyberbullying would go a long way in identifying areas and particular groups of children where support against cyberbullying is poor and in need of improvement.

Conclusion

Bullying has existed for a long time. As a result of the digital age and the ever more digitalization of our daily lives new benefits, such as those related to education and socialization has emerged. Unfortunately the digital age has also opened up the door for new dangers to children's wellbeing. One of such harms includes cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is far more severe than regular bullying. Cyberbullying enables perpetrators to do extreme harm to their victims that would never be possible when it comes to regular bullying. The far reach of the Internet allows one's humiliation at the hands of a bully to spread out across cyberspace. While only a handful of locals might witness a traditional bullying incident, YouTube and digital cameras make the spread of humiliation available to a much wider audience, in some cases reaching thousands of people. The Internet grants users that aim to hurt others a lot of anonymity to hide behind. Anonymity also helps remove the power imbalance so that anyone can be a bully. Technology also makes tracing the source of the attacks nearly impossible. With the increased cruelty of cyberbullying comes a deeper impact to the children involved. The effects of cyberbullying are in many ways worse than traditional bullying, infiltrating every part of a victim's life and causing psychological struggles and in some cases result in physical harm or suicide. And despite this cyberbullying is often ignored, being seen as a problem for parents and schools or underestimated as a potential danger to children's wellbeing.

Cyberbullying is a big issue. Comparing multiple studies, be it small in scale and limited to only one country or involving 30 countries, a similar trend is discovered. On average around 1/3 of all children globally experience cyberbullying. More frequently these children are younger than 13 years old, as a result from the rather easily accessible social media and online gaming applications that are not efficient in enforcing its minimum age of 13 years rules. Parents frequently confuse cyberbullying with regular bullying, which is a wrong perception. Cyberbullying is far worse than regular bullying and the negative impacts it can have on children are often overlooked or underestimated.

When looking at the issue of cyberbullying at its core, it is rather simple. Everywhere there are people that find entertainment from bringing misery on others. It does not matter if it occurs at a school playground or on social media if its possible to bring misery on others there will always be people that will do so for entertainment, regardless if they are poor or rich or living in a developed or developing country. However with the emergence of the Internet more opportunities and tools are provided to more people that enable others to bring misery to victims. People, who without the Internet would never be able to bully someone, now have all the tools they need at their disposal and a wide range of victims to chose from. On the Internet there is no such thing as distance. An

individual in Asia is able to cyber bully an individual in the US and vice versa. Cyberbullying is not a uniquely high-income issue or a low-income issue. It is not an issue exclusively to developed countries or developing countries. It is an issue that affects everyone, not discriminating between rich and poor. What is different is how the developed nations handle the problem, compared to the developed nations. Developed nations have had more time to adapt to the digital age, gaining experience and implementing policies to combat the dangers the Internet brings to children. Developing nations have only recently begun experiencing the digital age and currently are simply not experienced enough to combat the dangers to children online or have not given the dangers a high enough priority, focusing on the much needed economic benefits of the digital age over the safety and wellbeing of children. Children should not be neglected. They are the next generation that will oversee the development of developing countries and the advancement of technologies and societies as they continue to grow up. These children should not be neglected and the dangers of cyberbullying should not being ignored or not being as taken as serious as it is. Right now with cyberbullying still existing in both developed and developing countries more action needs to be taken to protect children.

With the Corona Virus continuing to spread, likely prolonging the pandemic and the lockdown measures, children's mental state is likely to weaken and being more frequently online. This combination could potentially have dangerous results. During the last lockdown a 70% increase in cyberbullying was measured. With no end in sign to the pandemic, with infection numbers increasing once again it is very possible we might see very soon an even larger increase in cyberbullying. Right now more than ever cyberbullying needs to be taken seriously and proper measures need to be taken by all actors involved in order to ensure children's wellbeing are protected and supported.

Recommendations Summarized:

1. Updating the UNCRC – Cyberbullying is not mentioned in the UNCRC, primarily due to the fact the convention was written before cyberbullying even existed. As a result there is no indication that children have a right to be protected against cyberbullying and what measures states need to take in order to fulfill those rights. A fourth Optional Protocol to the UNCRC is required. This gives the ability to push for state legislatures to take more action against cyberbullying as state legislatures are now obliged to so under international law.

2. Investing in apps and digital initiatives against cyberbullying – schools and parents not properly equipped to handle cases of cyberbullying. The Internet offers the possibly to introduce apps and programs, both large and small in scale, that enable victims of cyberbullying to receive help, be it in order to report the perpetrator or to seek aid in dealing with the physical and mental consequences of being cyberbullied. Since in the digital world, the concept of distance is basically non-existent people who live in the physical world far away are in the digital world only a few clicks away.

3. Improving data collection on cyberbullying – especially in developing countries cyberbullying is not as high as a priority as it should be, with state actors prioritizing the economic benefits the Internet can bring. In many developed countries the data collection programs on cyberbullying are also not as sufficient. Globally more has to be invested in data collection regarding the scope of cyberbullying, including the age of victims of it and their geographical location in order to determine in which area an improvement in anti-cyberbullying legislatures is required.

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