

# The hidden burden of Cyberbullying: Prevalence and risk among youth in a South Asian setting

Nazeer I<sup>1</sup>, Pathmeswaran A<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, University of Colombo

<sup>2</sup> Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

## Background

Cyberbullying: Any kind of aggression perpetrated through technology- through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites (including blogs), text messaging, or videos or pictures posted on websites or sent through phones

It is another dimension of abuse and interpersonal violence that has received less attention in low-middle income settings.

The exponential growth in the use of mobile phones and technological devices to access the Internet provides adolescents with many opportunities to communicate and access information but comes with the risk of cyberbullying.

## Objective

To determine the prevalence and patterns of cyberbullying, its associated factors, perceived effects and coping strategies among school children in the Capital Province of Sri Lanka.

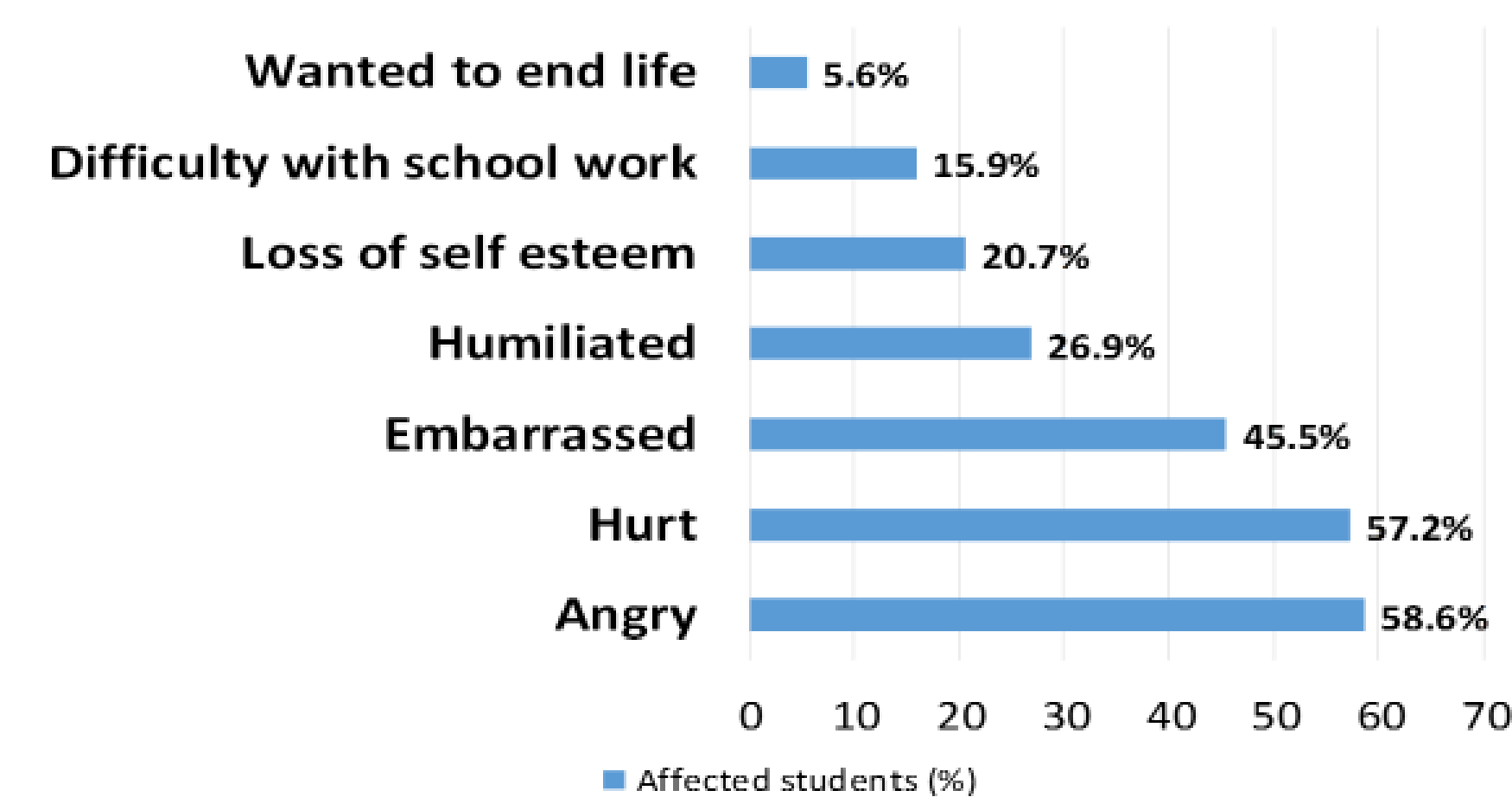
## Methods

A cross sectional analytical study was conducted among 825 high school youth in Colombo, identified using multistage cluster sampling method. The participants completed a self-administered web based questionnaire.

## Findings

Prevalence of cyberbully victimization and offending	n	%
Lifetime prevalence of cyberbully victimization	145	17.6
30 day prevalence of cyberbully victimization	36	4.4
Lifetime prevalence of cyberbully offending	102	12.4
30 day prevalence of cyberbully offending	46	5.6

## Perceived effects of cyberbullying



## Factors that increase the risk of being cyberbullied

Factors related to being cyberbullied	OR	95% CI
Spending more than one hour online daily	2.0	1.3-2.8
Having >1 account on a single social media network	2.9	2.0-4.3
Accessing the Internet mainly for social networking	2.4	1.6-3.4
Sharing personal information/photos on public forums	4.0	2.3-7.2
Befriending/communicating with unknown persons	3.0	1.6-3.4
Ignoring age restrictions online	2.3	1.5-3.5
No parental supervision while online	1.9	1.2-3.0
Victim of bullying by traditional means	4.2	2.8-6.1

## Implications

- The perverseness cyberbullying as a growing and serious form of abuse with potential for harm among children and youth need to be recognized.
- In a resource limited setting such as Sri Lanka where youth have very little access to counselling within schools, the implications for mental health should be recognized.
- While there appears to be a risk associated with befriending people online, the connections with traditional forms of bullying and the risks for cyberbullying from among their peers and own social networks cannot be ignored.
- While this calls for greater parental awareness and supervision on one hand, there is also a need for capacity building among youth to be able to recognize, cope, and address various forms of bullying within their own peer groups, on the other.
- Linguistically appropriate resources that are suitable to the local context may be needed to create awareness among youth and within schools to curb cyberbullying and mitigate the risks associated with it.