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The Role of Parental Protection of Teenage Children from Cyber Bullying: A Case of Ruai Ward, Kasarani Constituency in Nairobi County-Kenya

Dr. Mary M. Mogute
Senior Lecturer, Daystar University, Kenya

Abstract:
The upsurge of information technology (IT); easy accessibility and use of internet, mobile phones and other technological devices such as computers, tablets and smart phones have become part of peoples' lifestyles. IT has positively enhanced communication, networking, knowledge and skills sharing, online businesses and entertainment, turning the world into a global village. Despite these benefits, several challenges have marred the use of IT. Of interest to this paper is online cyberbullying of teenage children by bullies who take advantage of their age and innocence. Though there are no official statistics on the number of children exposed to cyber bullying, there is an increase of 88% children seeking help for online abuse. Effects of cyber bullying are devastating and they present themselves with physical, social and psychological dimensions. This necessitates parental protection of teenage children form cyber bullies. However, most parents are either not aware, unavailable or lack necessary support systems to equip them with knowledge of guiding and protecting teenage children while online. Teenagers have access to internet enabled devices but are hardly guided on how to prevent cyberbullying. Most parents and teenage children do not know how to respond when confronted with cyberbullying. As a result of this, parents who are teenagers' primary care givers are faced with the challenge of protecting their children from cyberbullying attacks. This is the background that informs this study which sought to; find out teenage children's ability to access internet, establish respondents' awareness of teenage children vulnerability to cyberbullying, investigate parental role in protecting teenage children from cyberbullying and suggest strategies to enhance teenage children protection from cyber bullying. This study used descriptive survey design; the target population of the study was church going parents with teenagers from five selected churches in Ruai Ward, Kasarani Constituency in Nairobi County-Kenya. Purposive sampling and interview schedules were used to identify the respondents and collect data respectively. The findings revealed that majority (94.1%) of teenagers had access to internet, 90.2% respondents were aware of cyberbullying risks, 88.2% guided their children on internet use and there was need for awareness creation and strict legal enforcement of laws to protect teenage children from cyberbullying.

Keywords: Information technology, cyber bullying, internet, parental protection, teenage children

1. Introduction and Background

The upsurge of information technology (IT) has come with positive and productive results that have enhanced efficiency in service delivery, information accessibility, sharing and networking, communication efficiency and reduced costs to the bare minimum besides making the world a global village where international trade is a reality as observed by Seema and Mahmood (1996). Information technology has created new opportunities like software development industries and data processing. Likewise, Shields and Behrman (2000) observe that possession of IT enabled devices such as desktop computers, laptops, i-pads, tablets and smart phones have become peoples' lifestyles. However, with the growth f IT has emerged persistent attacks and ever-increasing threats to its users as documented by Mitende and Ogalo (2017).

As adults embrace technology and take advantage of its positive force, most parents encourage their children to follow suit (Shields & Behrman, 2000). Parents facilitate teenage children to access the internet for academic, social and entertainment purposes. As a result, children and teenagers spend a lot of time online; often, without adult supervision and guidance (Bryan, 2013). This has serious repercussions as argued by Shields and Behrman (2000) who opinionate that unmonitored use of IT devices increases children's and teenagers' vulnerability to physical, social and psychological harm. Of interest to this study was the potential risks teenagers face from bullies as they surf the internet. Cyberbullies take advantage of teenagers' tender age and innocence to harass, threaten and violate their privacy. Though, official statistics on the number of children exposed to cyberbullying is unavailable, a report by the guardian (https://theguardian.com) indicate an increase of 88 percent children who seek help in relation to online abuse and violation.

Young children and teenagers who use online platforms such as MySpace, e-mails, blogs, social media and instant messaging using cell phones, i-pads and laptops have been victims of cyberbullying as reported by Patchin and Hinduja

(2006). Cyberbullies have managed remain anonymous as they manipulate and attempt to exert their power and control over their victims. In a study by Patchin and Hinduja (2006), more that 40% of youthful people who have been bullied remain silent and keep it to themselves out of fear of withdrawal of their internet enabled devices by their parents.

According to Laas and Boezaart (2014), psychological effects of cyberbullying lead to trauma due to threatening messages, emotional abuse and disruptions that bullies negatively use to manipulate their victims. They create fear in victims that lead to school drop out, self-confinement in exclusive places and in extreme cases addiction and suicide. Besides, cyberbullying infringes on children's rights by endangering their physical well being through acts that humiliate, embarrass and undermine their inherent human dignity such as sexual abuse, assault and murder. Considering the teenagers' stormy developmental stage, which in itself turbulent, cyberbullying disorients them further and throws them off balance, causing uncalled for suffering to these young people.

Bryan (2013) observes that parents as primary care givers of teenage children have realized that cyberbullying is a serious social concern. Hence, most parents have developed interest in understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying as a strategy to protect their children. This is consistent with the report by Hoffman (2010) who documents that parents seek for help from all avenues to facilitate their understanding on how they could protect their teenage children from cyberbullying. Parents' developed competences and understanding of the causes, extent and effects of cyber bullying facilitate appropriate guidance to their vulnerable children. Hence, Bryan (2013) endorsesthat parents deliberately seek to understand issues surrounding cyberbullying in this era of IT as a strategy to protect their teenage children from cyberbullies.

However, there is evidence (Hoffman, 2010) confirming that some parents are still ignorant and/or unconcerned about their children's vulnerability as they surf the net. Parents, who are unaware of looming risks their children are exposed to when online, are unable to guide and protect them from cyberbullying. This is the background that informed this study, which sought to establish the role of parental protection of teenage children from cyberbullying. The study also explored strategies that could be utilized to help teenage victims of cyberbullying in Ruai Ward, Kasarani Constituency in Nairobi County-Kenya.

2. Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study were to:
1. establish teenage children's ability to access internet;
2. assess respondents' awareness of teenage children vulnerability to cyberbullying;
3. investigate parental role in protecting teenage children from cyberbullying;
4. suggest strategies that could be adopted to enhance teenage children protection from cyberbullying

3. Methodology of the Study
This study used descriptive survey design that combined qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect and analyze data. The study population comprised of church going parents in Ruai Ward, Kasarani constituency in Nairobi County-Kenya. The target population was church going parents with teenage children between 13-17 years of age from selected churches in Ruai Ward. Convenience sampling technique was used to select five (5) churches from Ruai Ward. The churches were; St. Peters Catholic church, Githunguri PCEA church, Ruai South SDA church, Jet View SDA Church and Deliverance church. Further, purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at a study sample of 51 respondents from sampled churches. The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants visited the five churches after service and from each sampled church, ten(10) respondents (parents) accompanied by their teenage children were purposively selected and interviewed. Parents' accompaniment of their teenage children formed the basis of inclusion and exclusion of those sampled for this study. Interview schedules were used to collect data through face-to-face interviews. This technique of data collection allowed probing for clarity and facilitated observation. Analysis of generated data facilitated the coming up of study findings, conclusions and recommendations.

4. Study Findings/Results
The findings of this study are presented in the following sub-sections and in cognizance with the study objectives; respondents' demographic information, teenagers' access to internet, respondents' awareness of teenage children vulnerability to cyberbullying and recommendations to enhance teenage children protection from cyberbullying.

4.1. Respondents' Demographic Information
In this study, 51 parents of teenagers from selected churches in Ruai Ward, Kasarani Constituency in Nairobi County-Kenya were interviewed to ascertain the role they play in protecting their teenage children from cyberbullying. The study revealed that 27(52.9%) of the respondents were male while 24(47.1%) were female. Hence, data collected was fairly distributed as far as gender was concerned. Most of the respondents 21(41.2%) were between 41-50 years, 19(37.3%) were between 31-40 years while 10(19.6%) were above 50 years and the remaining 1(2%) was below 30 years of age. Hence, majority of the respondents were between 31-50 years of age.

The findings revealed that most 31(60.8%) of the respondents were Protestants, 12 (23.5%) belonged to other evangelical churches and the remaining 8(15.7%) were Catholics. Further, the findings of this study pointed out that

16(31.4%) of the respondents had three children, 13(25.5%) had four children, 8(15.7%) had five children and 2(3.9%) had six children while the remaining 2(4%) had one child each. Therefore, majority 37 (72.5%) of the respondents had three to five children. Further analysis revealed that most 18(38.4%) of the respondents had one boy, 16(34%) had two boys and the remaining 12(27.7%) respondents had 3 boys. A similar trend was reported for female children with 20(45.5%) of the respondents having two female children, 17(38.6%) had one female child while 7(15.9%) revealed that they had three female children.

4.2. Respondents' Teenage Children's Access to Internet
From the finding of this study, 48(94.1%) of the respondents reported that their teenage children had access to internet while only a staggering minority of 3(5.9%) did not. This finding confirms the report by Guardchild (2017) which shows that 96% of teenagers use social networking applications such as face book, MySpace, chat rooms and blogs while surfing the internet. Further, the respondents revealed that most 47(33.6%) of the teenagers accessed internet using smart phones, 26(18.6%) used laptops and desktop computers, 25(17.9%) used smart phones and another 17(17.9%) of the teenagers visited cyber cafés to access internet. Respondents indicated that their teenage children accessed internet using multiple devices, mostly within the confines of their homes.
Further analysis revealed that the devises teenagers used to access internet were either owned by their fathers 31(60.8%), mothers 31(60.8%), teenagers themselves 28(54.9%), teenagers' siblings 12(23.5%) or teenagers' friends 8(15.7%) as represented by the respective percentages. It is worth noting that more than half (54.9%) of the respondents reported that they had purchased smart phones for their teenage children. These were the gadgets the teens used to access internet. This finding confirms the report by UNICEF (2013), which has documented that smart phones and cyber café were commonly used by teenagers to access internet. This finding further corroborate with the observation made by Chang (2010) who argue that there has been an upsurge in the use of technological devices such as mobile phone, i-pads and laptops to surf the internet by teenagers and this has made them easy targets of cyberbullying. Chang (2010) emphasizes that children and teenagers who surf the internet are more vulnerable to cyberbullying.
Regarding the teenagers who accessed internet using their own devices, the study revealed that 34(66.7%) of the devices were bought by their fathers, 28(54.9%) by mothers, 13(25.5%) by siblings and 2(3.9%) by friends. It is important to note that 8(15.7%) of the parents reported that their teenage children had saved their own pocket money to purchase internet enabled phones. The finding of a study conducted by Pew Research Center (2015) asserts that 75% of teenagers have internet enabled phones they use to surf the internet. Ensuing from this finding, it is mainly parents who provided teenage children with devices that they used to access the internet.

4.3. Respondents' Awareness Level of their Children's Vulnerability to Cyber Bullying
As pertains to respondents' awareness level of their children's risk of being cyberbullied, this study established that majority 47(92.9%) of the respondents; 27(52.9%) males and 24(47.1%) females were aware that their children could be victims of cyberbullying while surfing the net. Only 3(5.9%) of the respondents were not aware that their children could be cyberbullied. The remaining 1(2%) of the respondents did not respond to this question. This finding is reinforced by the findings by Hoffman (2010) who argues that one in three of parents with children between 13-17 years were aware of possibilities of their teenage children being cyberbullied.
The respondents reported that they first heard about cyberbullying from; the media 34(66.7%), friends 32(62.7%), reading in newspapers and magazines 31(60.8%) and their church pastors 4(7.8%). Further probing pointed out that more than half 25(52.1%) of the respondents had deliberately taken time to understand what cyberbullying entails. This finding is similar with a report by Bryan (2013) and Hoffman (2010) who confirm that expansive use and growth of IT has led parents to seek to understand the dynamics of cyberbullying because it is a societal problem that cannot be any more wished away. Similarly, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) argue that continuous interactions and communication between parents and children about online activities is important. However, parents can engage in this discourse only when they are equipped with understanding of the dynamics of cyberbullying. Hence, parents ought to cultivate open communication and trusting relationships with their teenage children as a way of encouraging sharing of with each other in relation to cyberbullying. The findings of this study further revealed that 17(35.4%) of the respondents had not tried to find out any information about cyberbullying while 6(12.5%) had made some attempts. This finding is in tune with Tara (2008) encouragement that all parents should make attempts to understand the activities that lead to, and the impact of cyberbullying. Similarly, Bauman (2008) points out the need to create platforms that could be used to educate parents on cyberbullying.
The study further showed that majority 46(90.2%) of the respondents; 27(100%) males and 19(79.2%) females were aware that their teenagers were at risk of being victims of cyberbullying. This finding corroborate with the observation made by Hoffman (2010) who asserts that some parents are aware of the evils of cyberbullying, though to some degree helpless, the are in pursuit of understanding this problem. On the contrary, 4(7.8%) of the respondents, all of them females were not aware of the eminent dangers their teenage children faced while online. This finding reinforced the findings by Bauman (2008) who observes that some parents were not aware of what their children were exposed to while they were using the internet. One respondent, representing 2% did not respond to this question.To ascertain the level of awareness of the various types of cyberbullying, the respondents were asked to state the type of cyberbullying they were familiar with from a list provided by

interviewers. The responses obtained from the respondents indicated that most of the parents were aware of different activities of cyberbullying as presented in Table 1.

Awareness of the type of cyber bullying aware	Frequency	Percent
Harassment	51	100
Trickery	48	94.1
Dissing	47	92.2
Masquerading	46	90.2
Fake profiles	46	90.2
Flaming	45	88.2
Impersonation	45	88.2
Cyber stalking	43	84.3
Outing	40	78.4
Fraping	39	76.5
Trolling	38	74.5
Cat fishing	37	72.5
Exclusion	33	64.7

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of the Various Types of Cyber Bullying
*Multiple responses were allowed

Table 1 shows that all 51(100%) of the respondents were aware of harassment, 48(94.1%) were aware of trickery, 47(92.2%) were aware of dissing, 46(90.2%) were aware of fake profiles, 45(88.2%) were aware of flaming while another 45(88.2%) were aware of impersonation. Similarly, this study established that 43(84.3%) of the respondents were aware of cyber stalking, 40(78.4%) were aware of outing, 39(76.5%) were aware of frapping, 38(74.5%) were aware of trolling and 37(72.5%) of the respondents were aware of cat fishing while the remaining 33(64.7%) were aware of exclusion. From these findings, it can be deducted that most respondents' were aware of various types of cyber bullying with the least known being cat fishing at 33(64.7) and the most known being harassment with 51(100%) respondents' awareness rates. From this finding, it is evident that most parents had made deliberate efforts to understand the various types of cyber bullying as their first step of protecting their children from cyber attacks.

4.4. Parental Role in Protecting their Children from Cyber Bullying

In line with objective three of this study concerning parental roles in protecting teenage children from cyberbullying, the findings revealed that 23(45.1%) of the respondents took it upon themselves to regulate time teenagers spent on the net, 13(25.5%) occasionally regulated time while 15(29.4%) did not. From this finding, approximately 71% of the respondents regulated the time their teenagers spent surfing the net. This finding corroborate with the work of Gilkerson (2016), which recommends parental control on the time teenagers were allowed stay online.

The study also found out that 23(45.1%) of the respondents had conversations with their teenage children about cyberbullying while 19(37.3%) had never talked to their children about cyberbullying while the remaining 9(17.6%) had occasionally talked with their children about the risks of cyberbullying. This study established that 62.7% of the respondent deliberately created time to talk to their children about cyberbullying as advocated by Gilkerson (2016) and Tara (2008). However, the 37.3% of the respondents had not talked about cyberbullying with their children because they were not aware about the risks involved while surfing the net, and/or they did not imagine their children could be victims of cyberbullying. Besides, most teenagers hide their cyberbullying experiences for fear of withdrawal of their valued internet enabled gadgets as reported by Bauman (2008) and Tara (2008).

Similarly, this study established that 22(43.1%) of the respondents regularly monitored the content their teenage children interacted with while online. On the contrary, 18(35.3%) of the respondents reported that they did not and the remaining 11(21.6%) of the respondents stated that they seldom did. Hence, 64.7% of the respondents were keen to check on the content their children surfed. This finding is consistent with the recommendation made by Gilkersn (2016). Parents who could not monitor the content their children interacted with, was not able not understand the vulnerability their teenagers faced while on the internet. Hence, their inability to guide or protect their teenage children form cyber bullying due to their lack of understanding of the dangers involved while surfing the net.

The respondents were further asked to state if they deliberately created time to guide their teenage children about the possibilities of being cyberbullied while surfing the internet. Majority 40(78.4%) of the respondents reported that they guided their teenage children on the content they ought to interact with while 5(9.8%) occasionally did and the remaining 6(11.8%) had never given their teenage children any guidance regarding internet use.Likewise, 29(58%) of the respondents reported that they took time to establish the content their teenage children surfed while they were online. On the contrary, 11(22%) of the respondents did not and the remaining 10(20%) rarely did. Hence, a majority (80%) of the respondent revealed that they guided their children. Similarly, 29(56.9%) of the respondents reported that they had opportunities to view their teenage children's profile pages, 17(33.3%) had never while 5(9.8%) occasionally did. Majority 35(71.4%) of the respondents

indicated that their children trusted and could confide in them in case of any online encounter with cyberbullies. This contradicts what has been documented by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) and Tara (2008) who observed that most teenagers who had been cyberbullied did not report these incidents to their parents because they feared that their parents could withdraw their devices or restrict them on internet use.

The study also endeavored to find out if the respondents had safety rules for their teenage children that guided them as they used the internet. In response to this question, 30(58.8%) of the respondents reported that they had set rules while 21(41.2%) had no such rules. In addition to this, the findings revealed that 29(56.9%) of the respondents had taught their teenage children how to prevent or stop online communication from cyberbullies while 22(43.1%) had not. Similarly, 29(56.9%) of the respondents had taught their children how to save evidence of online bullying while 22(43.1%) had not.

4.5. Strategies that could be used to Protect Teenage Children from Cyber bullying

The fourth objective of the study sought to explore into various strategies that could be utilized by parents to help their teenage children who might be victims of cyberbullying. To ascertain this, the respondents were asked to identify the ways they were likely to react in case their teenage children were cyberbullied. A list containing different reactions was provided and the findings revealed that majority 50(98%) of the respondents could remain calm as they helped their children out of cyberbullying trauma. Another 44(86.3%) revealed that they would show their children empathy while 42(82.4%) indicated that they would seek professional intervention on behalf of their children since they were aware of the devastating effects of cyberbullying. Yet, another 37(72.5%) of the respondents indicated that in the event their teenage children were cyberbullied, they would use that as an opportunity to give further guidance to their teenage children about the risks associated with the use of internet. On the other hand, 34(66.7%) revealed that if their teenagers were cyberbullied, they would take that as an opportunity to set clear rules that could guide them on how to interact with the net. Further still, 32(62.7%) of the respondents revealed that they will take a step back, allow their children to process what had happened, then revisit the issue later when both of them are calm and less threatened to encourage and give guidance to the teenagers. The remaining 32(62.7%) of the respondents reported that they would encourage open of communication with their children as a way of helping them.Contrary to most of the respondents who indicated that they could use positive approaches to support their teenage children in case of cyberbullying, 10(19.6%) of the respondents reported that they would withdraw internet enabled devices from the teenagers as a way of disciplining them. This concurs with the argument presented by Laas and Boazaart (2014) and Tara (2008). Another 5(9.8%) stated that they would quarrel the teenagers for having allowed themselves to be vulnerable and 1(2%) respondent stated that they could not react in any way.

The respondents suggested practical steps that they could adopt to enhance protection of their teenage children from cyberbullying. More than half 34(56.7%) of the respondents stated that educating their teenage children about cyberbullying could be helpful, 13(21.7%) argued that free and open communication with teenage children could lead to trust and confidence between teenagers and their parents. This could reassure teenage children to feel safe and share their experiences with their parents without fear of condemnation or withdrawal of their internet enabled devices. Similarly, 4(6.7%) of the respondents suggested that conducting seminars for parents and teenagers to empower them about the use of internet and the risks involved is important. Another strategy recommended by 3(5%) of the respondents was parental guidance and advise to teenage children. Other respondents 3(5%) suggested pastoral and parental counseling and prayers as an alternative way of intervention using spiritual approach while 2(3.3%) of the respondents reported that parental monitoring of children's online activities and teaching them to uphold the right morals could alleviate the problem of cyberbullying and the remaining 1(1.7%) respondent reported that effective, non-threatening parental communication with their teenage children could be helpful.

Finally, the respondents were asked to suggest strategies that could be adopted to enhance protection of children and teenagers from cyberbullying in the modern society. As Table 2 shows, 27(38.6%) of the respondents recommended the need for tough legislation with harsh penalties for cyber bullies, 25(35.7%) of the respondents suggested parental monitoring and regulating of the content teenagers interact with while online, 5(7.1%) suggested the need to filter the content teenage children access and use on the net while another 5(7.1%) of the respondents recommended awareness creation and education of teenagers on the risks associated with cyberbullying. Likewise, 5(7.1%) of the respondents recommended development of health and open relationship between parents and their teenage children facilitated by key societal institutions such as faith-based institutions, learning institutions and community based organizations. Another 2(2.9%) of the respondents were of the opinion that church could take the lead in empowering their congregations about the risks related to internet us and the remaining 1(1.5%) suggested creation of employment opportunities to engage idle youth who turn to be cyber bullies out of boredom could be another strategy to control cyberbullying. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

Recommended policy suggestion	Frequency	Percent
Tough legislation	27	38.6
Monitor and regulate	25	35.7
Educate children	5	7.1
Good relationship child and parent	5	7.1
Create awareness through community institutions	5	7.1
Involve church in empowering and creating awareness	2	2.9
Create employment opportunities to keep bullies busy	1	1.5

Table 2: Recommended Policies for the protection of children

5. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that cyberbullying is a serious problem in society since teenagers have easy access to internet enabled devices mainly provided by family members but with little guidance on how to safeguard themselves against cyberbullying. This study pointed out that some parents had not even talked to their children about cyberbullying because, they themselves were no aware of it. As a result of this ignorance, they had not established any protective or regulatory measures to safeguard their teenage children from cyber attacks. These findings notwithstanding, most interviewed parents were conscious of the risks their teenage children were exposed to and had tried to empower themselves as well as their children to understand the dynamics of cyberbullying and how to effectively respond to them as a way of promoting their children's protection and safety from cyber attacks.

6. Recommendations

Parents have a major role of protecting their teenage children from cyberbullying. However, this study established that there are some parents who were not able to guide and protect their children from cyberbullying attacks due to ignorance or lack of empowerment. To address this challenge, there is need to create awareness and educate parents about the risks their children are exposed to while using the internet. With this kind of empowerment, parents will be more supportive to their teenage children, equip them with knowledge and skills on how to protect themselves from incidents of cyberbullying, stop cyberbullying as well as save evidence of cyberbullying in cases of attack. Equally, parents should promote health relationships with their teenage children to foster open communication and trust. Parents should find ways of filtering the content their children surf while on the internet and above all, stiff and effective legislations in addition to harsh penalties should be used to constrain bullies from engaging in this vice. All these efforts will enhance parental protection of teenage children from cyberbullying and create a safer environment for children as they use and benefit from wealth of information technology.

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