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Effectiveness of a Health Promotion Intervention to Reduce Cyberbullying Among Students at the Technical College, Anuradhapura

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Background: Cyberbullying is an escalating public health issue, threatening the psychological and social wellbeing of youths. Students in technical institutes in Sri Lanka are particularly vulnerable due to characteristics such as age, early school exit. Despite existing efforts, addressing this issue requires a holistic and sustainable intervention like health promotion.

Objective: This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of a health promotion intervention in reducing cyberbullying among students at College of Technology (CoT) by addressing its underlying determinants.

Methods: A quasi-experimental pre-post study was conducted among 50 students at the CoT, Anuradhapura. A four-month health promotion intervention, guided by a conceptual framework, was developed. Students were facilitated to identify and clarify determinants through group discussions, observations, and student-led activities. Prioritized determinants were addressed through targeted activities; ice-breakers (inadequate peer response, glorification), compliment box (poor peer relationships), miming activity and reflective wall (knowledge gaps on impacts), and traffic-calendar (problematic social-media use). The slogan “Spot it, Stop it” was developed concurrently, monitors were appointed for follow-up and an anti-cyberbullying club was initiated to ensure sustainability. Pre- and post-intervention data were collected via self-administered questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results: The proportion of students reporting at least once experiencing cyber-victimization three months before the intervention reduced significantly after the intervention; Impersonation (80.8% to 42.3%, $p < 0.001$, CI: 25.1–51.9) insulting messages/calls (71.2% to 40.4%, $p = 0.002$, CI: 12.1–48.4), and unauthorized photo sharing (69.2% to 26.9%, $p < 0.001$, CI: 24.2–60.4). Similarly, students reporting involvement in cyber-perpetration also reduced; insulting messages (71.2% to 21.2%, $p < 0.001$, CI: 31.8–68.2), verbal cyberbullying (51.9% to 5.8%, $p < 0.001$, CI: 30.4–61.8).

Conclusion: A health promotion intervention can significantly reduce cyberbullying by empowering students to recognize and respond to such behaviours, whether as perpetrators, victims, or observers.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Health promotion, Technical College