Facebook, Violence and Safety of Children in Bangladesh

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It is time to 'bury the myth' that Facebook use is restricted among the young students of the developed countries. The rapid development of mobile network and easy availability of smart phone made Facebook the most popular social networking sites in Bangladesh like many other developing countries. One-fourth of the total population of this country is composed of adolescents between the ages of 10-19 [1] and most of them use Facebook in the recent years. According to Internet World Stat the total number of Facebook user in Bangladesh were 28,000,000 on November 2015 [2]. Most of the young students use Facebook in the recent years. In a study, Soron and Tarafder found students started creating their Facebook account at the age of eight. Moreover, about 14% of the respondents of the study admitted that they started using Facebook before 13 years by violating the terms and conditions of the site [3]. This rapid expansion of the Internet and other digital media has brought new opportunities and concerns. Many researchers focused on the potential risks of this development (such as exposure to inappropriate material), while others focus on how this might be related to (or even driving) social change in general [4]. Children are at the highest risk and they encounter a variety of risks online but, whilst 'public anxiety focuses on pornography, bullying and stranger danger', but children themselves have other concerns [5]. Parents are concern about the online activities of the children.

Almost one in six of 6- to 9-year-old and one in five of 8- to 9-year-old children have experienced what parents were considering objectionable or aggressive behavior online [6]. However, children and young people growing in different social and economic backgrounds have different media experiences [7]. The social media like Facebook is influencing our physical, social and psychological makeup. The psychological impact of social media on children and young people was greatest on self-esteem and well-being with related issues around cyberbullying, 'Facebook Depression' and body image [8].

Facebook has been criticized over recent years for allowing violent and graphic images and videos on its pages. The scenario is worse in the developing countries due lack of proper regulation and execution of law. It has sparked the violence on several occasions in Bangladesh. Violence is defined in the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH), as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation [9]."

Violence causes more than 1.6 million deaths worldwide every year in which more than 90% of these occur in low- and middle-income countries. Violence is one of the leading causes of death in all parts of the world for persons ages 15 to 44 [10]. There are two distinct types of violence experienced by children (defined by the United Nations as anyone aged 0-18 years) - child maltreatment by parents and caregivers in children aged 0-14, and violence occurring in community settings among adolescents aged 15-18 years. Moreover, where income gaps have widened or there has been rapid social change, levels of interpersonal violence tend to rise [10]. Bangladesh is going through these sorts of transformation in economic and social sectors and the increased violence. The newest arsenal of violence in Facebook like uploading a video physical torture or sexual harassment was considered as a popular way gaining attention of mass population. A shocking example was the murder of a 13-year-old boy Samiul Alam Rajon. He was beaten to death in Sylhet city in Bangladesh on 8th July 2015 branding him a thief [11]. One of the main motives of this act was to get popularity in Facebook and demonstration of power. This was the example of the single event that rocks the nation. However, hundreds of videos were uploaded in the Facebook after the incidents. Most of the times children and female were the victims. Cyberbullying behavior was frequently occurred on Facebook. Children become victim of pedophiles and the anonymity makes it easy for unscrupulous people to target young teens and engage them in harmful conversations. It's easy for predators to pose as teens and lure children into harmful real world contact as well. Cyber bullying and harassment are most often perpetrated by other teens and tend to happen most to older girls and to teens of either gender who have a strong online presence [12].

Domestic violence is quite common in Bangladesh and about 87% of married women are abused by their husband [13] and about 65% of women get married under the age of 18 year in Bangladesh. Facebook is adding fuel to this problem by increasing jealousy and mistrust [14].

However, to prevent violence and ensure the safety of children, Facebook is also found to be effective. Many Facebook pages in Bangladesh are working to some extent to prevent violence against women and children. As a part of CDC's Injury Center, the Division of Violence Prevention works created the VetoViolence Facebook page to prevent violence and its consequences, which includes sharing the importance of prevention to all of our audiences where they engage in discussions. Mobile apps can be handy to protect the children from violence in the Facebook. We can restrict few extreme violent games for our children. A collective effort from a multidisciplinary team can reduce the potential risk of violence to children in the developing countries.

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