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## Cyber Crime: Impact on Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

In the digital age, cybercrime is spreading like a plague across the world, not only causing economic or institutional damage, but also negatively affecting young people, putting their lives in deep crisis. This study looks at how devastating the impact of cybercrime can be during adolescence, severely affecting important aspects such as emotional vulnerability and social standing. Teenagers are among the most active users of digital platforms in large numbers. They are uniquely exposed to cyberbullying, online harassment, various crimes by hiding their identity, sexual harassment and various crimes through misinformation. Such cybercrime not only affects their safety, but also gives rise to depression and creates mental stress, reduces self-esteem and the ability to understand, and creates long-term mental illness. Moreover, exposure to various forms of online crime addiction and temptation is completely destroying the performance of the youth. It is destroying the bonds of family relationships. In terms of social and self-esteem, the increasing incidence of cybercrime and crime among the youth is posing a formidable challenge to the law enforcement agencies, which is clearly a threat to the generation, many strong and strategic frameworks need to be established technologically to combat this crime. The study focuses on the urgent need to introduce integrated strategies, legal protection, parental awareness, school-based awareness seminars and youth-led digital literacy programs to reduce the negative impact of this crime. By examining the position and vulnerabilities of adolescents in the context of cybercrime, the paper strongly emphasizes that protecting the young generation is central to building a stable and safe digital future.

**Keywords:** Cybercrime, Adolescence and its impact, cyberbullying, Psychological impact, Ensuring digital safety

### 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the world has undergone a dramatic transformation in the way people communicate, learn, work, and entertain them. This transformation has been driven largely by the rapid growth of the internet, social media platforms, smartphones, and other forms of digital technology. While these developments have brought enormous benefits to society, they have also created new challenges and threats. One of the most alarming of these threats is cybercrime criminal activity that takes place in the digital environment or is facilitated by technology. Cybercrime affects individuals of all ages, but adolescents are particularly vulnerable. Adolescence is a period of rapid psychological, social, and emotional change. Young people are often eager to explore the digital world, connect with peers, and experiment with new ideas. However, their enthusiasm, combined with limited life experience and sometimes a lack of awareness about online dangers, can make them prime targets for cybercriminals (Ali, 2020). In Bangladesh and across the globe, adolescents are facing increasing exposure to cyber threats such as cyber bullying, online scams, identity theft, hacking, and exposure to harmful content. The consequences are not limited to the virtual space they can spill over into the real world, causing psychological distress, family

conflict, educational disruption, and even legal consequences (Rahman, 2021). This article aims to explore the concept of cybercrime in detail, drawing on both national and global perspectives. It will discuss definitions from various organizations and scholars, describe the types and nature of cybercrime, examine its specific impact on adolescents in multiple domains of life, outline its causes, and highlight the role those social workers can play in prevention and intervention.

## **2. Concepts of Cybercrime**

Cybercrime is a broad term that has been defined in various ways by international and national organizations. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines cybercrime as *“any crime that is committed using a computer, network, or hardware device, where the computer may be the agent, facilitator, or target of the crime”* (UNODC, 2013). This definition captures the technological component of the offence, emphasizing that cybercrime can either be the direct misuse of digital tools or crimes where digital technology plays a supportive role.

Similarly, INTERPOL describes cybercrime as crimes *“directed at computers or other devices, or where computers are integral to the offence”* (INTERPOL, 2020). This definition includes both purely digital crimes such as hacking and hybrid crimes like online fraud, where the offence has offline consequences.

In Bangladesh, the Digital Security Act 2018 provides a legal definition of cyber offences, which includes unauthorized access, publication of offensive or false information, cyber bullying, and identity theft. These definitions are meant to give law enforcement agencies the scope to address a wide range of digital offences (Digital Security Act, 2018). Scholars have also offered various definitions of cybercrime, often reflecting the evolving nature of technology and its misuse.

Wall (2007) defines cybercrime as *“criminal and illegal activities facilitated by information and communications technology.”*

Chawki (2010) explains it as *“the use of computers and the internet to commit acts that are criminal in nature, whether against individuals, organizations, or governments.”*

Gordon and Ford (2006) take a broader view, defining it as *“any crime that is facilitated or committed using a computer or network, or hardware device where the device is the object of the crime.”*

These scholarly definitions highlight that cybercrime can be directed towards individuals, businesses, or even state systems and can involve both tangible harm like financial loss and intangible harm such as emotional distress.

## **3. Types and Nature of Cybercrime**

Cybercrime is not a single, uniform activity. It covers a broad spectrum of offences, ranging from relatively minor acts such as spamming to serious crimes like online sexual exploitation and large-scale hacking of government systems. Understanding the types and nature of cybercrime is essential for grasping its complexity and its specific impact on adolescents.

### **3.1 Types of Cyber Crime**

Researchers and law enforcement agencies generally classify cybercrime into three major categories-

### Crimes against Individuals

These are offences where the primary target is an individual. Examples include:

- ❖ **Cyber bullying** – Repeated harassment or humiliation via digital platforms.
- ❖ **Identity theft** – Stealing personal information such as passwords, bank details, or social security numbers to commit fraud.
- ❖ **Online stalking** – Persistent, unwanted surveillance or contact that causes distress.
- ❖ **Revenge porn and sextortion** – The non-consensual sharing of intimate images or blackmail based on them.

### Crimes against property

These crimes target digital property, such as data, programs, and intellectual property. Examples include:

- ❖ **Hacking** – Gaining unauthorized access to computer systems.
- ❖ **Phishing** – Deceptive emails or messages designed to steal sensitive information.
- ❖ **Copyright infringement** – Illegal downloading or sharing of movies, music, or software.

### Crimes against Government or society

These offences aim to disrupt, damage, or manipulate systems that affect national security or public order. Examples include:

- ❖ **Cyber terrorism** – Using the internet to conduct attacks that cause fear or physical harm.
- ❖ **Hacking into government databases** – To steal confidential information or sabotage systems.
- ❖ **Spreading disinformation** – Using fake news to influence public opinion or destabilize society.

### 3.2 Nature of Cybercrime

Cybercrime has certain characteristics that make it distinct from traditional crime

- ❖ **Borderless** – Cybercrime can be committed from anywhere in the world, making jurisdictional control difficult (Wall, 2007).
- ❖ **Anonymity** – Perpetrators often hide their identities using encryption or fake accounts.
- ❖ **Speed and Scale** – A single act (like posting harmful content) can reach millions within minutes.
- ❖ **Low Cost, High Impact** – Many forms of cybercrime require little investment but can cause severe harm to victims.
- ❖ **Persistence of Harm** – Once information is online, it is difficult to remove, meaning victims may suffer long-term consequences.

For adolescents, these characteristics amplify the risks. A teenager may be bullied in school, but cyber bullying can continue day and night, reach a larger audience, and leave permanent digital scars (Kowalski et al., 2014).

### 4. Causes of Cybercrime Affecting Adolescents

Understanding why adolescents become involved in cybercrime either as victims or perpetrators requires looking at a mix of technological, social, and psychological factors. Adolescents are at a stage where curiosity, peer pressure, and identity formation are intense, which makes them more vulnerable in the digital world.

### **Easy Access to Technology**

One of the primary causes is the widespread availability of smartphones, tablets, and computers. Internet connectivity has become faster, cheaper, and more accessible. While this brings educational benefits, it also opens doors to misuse. Adolescents can connect with strangers, access illegal material, or engage in harmful online behavior with just a few clicks. The 24/7 nature of technology means that risky interactions can occur at any time, often without parental awareness.

### **Lack of Digital Literacy**

Many adolescents use the internet without a clear understanding of online safety, privacy settings, or the legal consequences of their actions. They may not recognize phishing emails, fake profiles, or scams. This lack of awareness can lead to them unintentionally sharing sensitive personal information, making them easy targets for hackers, scammers, and online predators.

### **Peer Pressure and Social Influence**

Peer approval is critically important during adolescence. If friends are engaged in hacking, online pranks, or illegal downloads, a teenager may join in to fit in. Similarly, social media can amplify unhealthy competition for attention through likes, shares, and comments, pushing some adolescents to engage in risky or unethical online behavior.

### **Anonymity and Reduced Accountability**

The internet gives a false sense of security because actions often feel detached from real-life consequences. Adolescents may believe they can bully, harass, or share offensive content without getting caught. This perception of anonymity lowers their moral inhibitions, leading to harmful actions they might never consider in person.

### **Curiosity and Thrill-Seeking Behavior**

Adolescents are naturally curious and sometimes engage in “testing boundaries.” The challenge of breaking into a password-protected account or accessing restricted websites can feel exciting, even if it is illegal. Unfortunately, this thrill-seeking behavior can escalate to more serious offences if not addressed early.

### **Family and Social Environment**

Family relationships and supervision play a key role. Adolescents who experience neglect, lack of parental involvement, or domestic conflict may seek validation and connection online. Similarly, communities with limited recreational or educational facilities may push young people toward online activities, both positive and negative.

### **Weak Law Enforcement and Legal Awareness**

In many countries, including Bangladesh, there is limited awareness among adolescents about cyber laws. Weak enforcement and slow investigation processes mean that offenders sometimes face no consequences, encouraging repeated offences. Additionally, victims may hesitate to report crimes due to fear of stigma or lack of trust in the justice system.

### **Psychological and Emotional Factors**

Low self-esteem, depression, and loneliness can make adolescents more susceptible to manipulation by online predators or extremist groups. Likewise, unresolved anger or frustration can be expressed through cyber bullying or other online aggression.

## **5. Bangladesh and Global Perspectives on Cybercrime**

Cybercrime is a global challenge, but its patterns, frequency, and severity differ depending on a country's technological infrastructure, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural environment. Bangladesh, as a developing country with rapidly growing internet usage, faces its own set of unique challenges, while also sharing many similarities with global trends.

### **5.1 Bangladesh Perspective**

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has witnessed a massive growth in internet penetration. From social networking to online business, the internet is deeply integrated into daily life, particularly among adolescents. However, this progress has also increased opportunities for cybercrime.

#### **Rapid Growth of Internet Users**

In urban and rural areas alike, affordable smartphones and mobile data have made the internet accessible to millions. Adolescents, in particular, are among the most active users. While this offers new learning opportunities, it also exposes them to cyber threats such as cyber bullying, identity theft, and online harassment.

#### **Common Forms of Cybercrime in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the most reported types of cybercrime include hacking of social media accounts, financial scams via mobile banking apps, and non-consensual sharing of personal photos or videos. Adolescents are often targeted because they may lack the knowledge to secure their online profiles or verify information sources.

#### **Social Media Influence**

Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, SnapChat and X are widely popular in Bangladesh. While they serve as important spaces for self-expression, they are also used for blackmail, spreading misinformation, and harassment. Adolescents often find themselves entangled in "Facebook ID hacks" or fake account scams, which can lead to emotional distress and public embarrassment.

#### **Legal Measures**

The Digital Security Act (2018) in Bangladesh aims to combat cybercrime, but critics argue that it focuses more on regulating content than on providing direct protection to victims. Many adolescents and even parents remain unaware of how to use legal channels to address cyber offences.

#### **Challenges in Enforcement**

The Cyber Crime Investigation Division of the police works to address digital offences, but the volume of cases is overwhelming. Limited technical resources, lack of specialized training, and slow case resolution make it difficult to ensure justice in a timely manner.

### **5.2 Global Perspective**

On a global scale, cybercrime has become a multi-billion-dollar industry, affecting individuals, corporations, and governments. For adolescents worldwide, the risks are similar, but the scale and sophistication of crimes can vary.

#### **Global Trends**

Internationally, cybercrime includes activities such as ransom ware attacks, data breaches, online grooming, human trafficking, and intellectual property theft. Adolescents are

increasingly targeted for recruitment into illegal online activities, particularly through gaming communities and encrypted messaging apps.

### **Technological Advancement**

As technology evolves, so does cybercrime. Artificial intelligence, deep fake technology, and the dark web are now tools for sophisticated scams and exploitation. Adolescents often become victims of fake “online challenges” or manipulated videos that can harm their reputations.

### **International Laws and Cooperation**

Many countries have introduced cybercrime laws, and international organizations such as INTERPOL and the United Nations have encouraged cross-border cooperation. However, due to differences in legal definitions and enforcement capabilities, cybercriminals can exploit loopholes by operating from countries with weaker regulations.

### **Cultural and Regional Differences**

In developed countries, cybercrime often focuses on financial fraud, large-scale hacking, and corporate espionage. In contrast, developing countries like Bangladesh see a higher prevalence of social media harassment, identity theft, and small-scale scams that directly affect individuals.

### **Shared Challenges**

Globally, one of the biggest challenges is keeping pace with technology. Law enforcement agencies, parents, and educators often lag behind in understanding the platforms and tools that adolescents are using, creating gaps that cybercriminals exploit.

## **6. Impact of Cyber Crime on Adolescents**

Cybercrime affects adolescents in complex and multifaceted ways, touching not only their immediate emotional state but also their long-term development, relationships, and sense of security. Adolescents are at a particularly vulnerable stage in life - their identities are still forming, their emotional resilience is developing, and their understanding of the online world is often incomplete. As a result, the consequences of cybercrime for this age group can be profound and lasting.

### **6.1 Psychological Impact**

Cybercrime can deeply affect adolescents’ mental and emotional well-being. Unlike physical crimes, cybercrimes often take place in a space that adolescents view as safe - their personal digital devices. This breach of trust can intensify the emotional damage.

#### **Anxiety and Fear**

Victims of cyber bullying, identity theft or online harassment often experience intense anxiety. They may constantly fear that personal photos, messages, or private details will be leaked or misused. This fear can become chronic, leading to social withdrawal and hesitation to participate in online spaces.

#### **Depression and Emotional Distress**

When adolescents face humiliation online, the sense of exposure can be overwhelming. Public shaming on social media platforms, especially in small communities, can lead to depressive symptoms. The permanence of online content often amplifies this distress, as victims feel the incident can never truly be erased.

### **Low Self-Esteem**

Cybercrimes that target physical appearance, cultural background, or personal achievements can damage an adolescent's self-image. Persistent online ridicule may cause them to internalize negative perceptions about themselves, eroding their confidence in social and academic settings.

### **Trauma and Long-Term Psychological Scars**

For adolescents exposed to more severe cybercrimes, such as sexual exploitation or revenge pornography, the psychological impact can be equivalent to or even greater than that of offline abuse. Such trauma may affect their trust in people for years, making it difficult to form healthy relationships.

## **6.2 Social Impact**

The social repercussions of cybercrime for adolescents extend beyond the online sphere and often affect real-world relationships and community interactions.

### **Peer Relationships**

Cyber bullying can create divisions among friends. Some peers may side with the perpetrator, while others distance themselves from the victim to avoid being targeted. This social isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness.

### **Family Communication**

When adolescents are victims of cybercrime, they may hesitate to share their experiences with parents due to fear of punishment, restrictions, or not being understood. This secrecy can weaken family bonds and reduce trust between parents and children.

### **Stigma in Community**

In smaller communities, especially in rural and semi-urban Bangladesh, news of cyber incidents spreads quickly. Adolescents who are victims may be labeled or stigmatized, making it harder for them to participate in social events without facing judgment.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

In cultures with strong notions of family honor and reputation, cyber incidents even minor ones can have disproportionate social consequences. Girls in particular may face harsher criticism or victim-blaming, which can restrict their mobility and freedom.

## **6.3 Educational and Developmental Impact**

Cybercrime can disrupt an adolescent's educational journey, sometimes causing setbacks that affect future opportunities.

### **Academic Decline**

Victims may struggle to focus on studies due to emotional distress or time spent addressing the consequences of cybercrime. In severe cases, absenteeism from school increases, leading to poorer grades and potential dropout.

### **Reduced Digital Participation**

Fear of being targeted again may make adolescents reluctant to use digital tools or participate in online learning. This withdrawal can hinder the development of digital literacy skills, which are crucial for modern education.

### **Interrupted Social Development**

Adolescence is a critical period for building communication skills, leadership abilities, and teamwork experiences. If cybercrime forces a student into isolation, their social development may stall, impacting their ability to adapt to future professional and social environments.

### **Misdirected Aspirations**

Negative online experiences can lead adolescents to make life decisions based on fear rather than ambition. For instance, a student who was harassed online for sharing art or opinions may stop pursuing creative or public careers.

## **6.4 Legal and Ethical Consequences**

Cybercrime can involve legal complexities that are difficult for adolescents to navigate.

### **Lack of Awareness of Rights**

Many adolescents are unaware that what they are experiencing qualifies as a punishable cyber offence. Without knowledge of digital rights, they may not report incidents to authorities.

### **Criminalization of Minors**

In some cases, adolescents themselves become perpetrators often without fully understanding the legal consequences of their actions, such as sharing harmful memes, forwarding private content, or hacking accounts “for fun.”

### **Fear of Legal Systems**

Victims may hesitate to file police reports due to fear of public exposure or mistrust of law enforcement. In Bangladesh, legal processes can be lengthy and intimidating, which discourages many from pursuing justice.

### **Cross-Border Jurisdiction Issues**

When the perpetrator is in another country, legal action becomes more complicated. This is particularly problematic for cases involving social media platforms headquartered overseas.

## **6.5 Other Effects**

Cybercrime’s impact on adolescents can also manifest in less obvious but equally important ways.

### **Health issues**

Stress from cyber incidents can lead to sleep disturbances, headaches, and weakened immune systems. Adolescents may also develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as overeating or self-harm.

### **Economic Costs**

Families may incur financial losses if cybercrime involves monetary scams or the need for professional IT support. In low-income households, this can create additional stress and conflict.

### **Lifestyle Changes**

To avoid further harassment, adolescents may alter their daily routines changing schools, reducing online activity, or limiting social circles which can disrupt their personal growth.

## **7. Role of Social Workers to Prevent Cybercrime in Adolescents**

Social workers play a vital role in addressing the multifaceted challenges of cybercrime among adolescents. Their unique position allows them to work at the intersection of family, school, community, and legal systems to promote awareness, support victims, and advocate for protective measures. This section explores the responsibilities and strategies social workers can employ to prevent and mitigate cybercrime impacts on adolescents.

### **Awareness and Education**

One of the primary roles of social workers is to increase awareness about cybercrime risks and safety practices among adolescents, their families, and communities.

- ❖ **Digital Literacy Programs:** Social workers can collaborate with schools and community centers to organize workshops that teach young people how to use the internet safely. This includes recognizing phishing attempts, understanding privacy settings, and developing critical thinking to evaluate online information.
- ❖ **Parental Guidance:** Educating parents about their role in monitoring online activities without infringing on adolescents' privacy helps create a safer digital environment. Social workers can provide tools and resources to help parents communicate effectively about cyber risks.
- ❖ **Community Campaigns:** Social workers can initiate public awareness campaigns highlighting the dangers of cybercrime, reducing stigma around reporting incidents, and promoting responsible digital citizenship.

### **Counseling and Support Services**

Adolescents affected by cybercrime often suffer from psychological and social distress. Social workers provide essential counseling and emotional support services.

- ❖ **Individual Counseling:** Through empathetic listening and therapeutic techniques, social workers can help victims process their experiences, rebuild self-esteem, and develop coping strategies.
- ❖ **Group Therapy:** Support groups facilitated by social workers enable adolescents to share experiences and learn from peers, reducing feelings of isolation and shame.
- ❖ **Family Mediation:** Social workers can facilitate open communication within families, helping parents understand their child's struggles and promoting supportive family environments.

### **Advocacy and Policy Engagement**

Social workers also act as advocates for stronger protections against cybercrime.

- ❖ **Policy Development:** By working with policymakers, social workers can help shape laws and regulations that better protect adolescents, such as clearer cyber bullying legislation or more accessible reporting mechanisms.
- ❖ **School Policy Implementation:** Social workers assist schools in creating and enforcing anti-cyber bullying policies and protocols for responding to cyber incidents.
- ❖ **Victim Rights Advocacy:** Ensuring that adolescent victims receive fair treatment from law enforcement and justice systems is another crucial role. Social workers can guide victims through legal processes and advocate for child-friendly procedures.

### **Collaboration with Stakeholders**

Preventing cybercrime requires cooperation between multiple sectors.

- ❖ **Schools and Educators:** Social workers partner with teachers and school counselors to identify at-risk students and integrate cyber safety into the curriculum.

- ❖ **Law Enforcement Agencies:** Building relationships with police and cybercrime units allows social workers to support victims during investigations and promote child-sensitive approaches.
- ❖ **Healthcare Providers:** Coordination with mental health professionals ensures holistic care for adolescents suffering psychological effects.
- ❖ **Technology Companies:** Social workers can liaise with social media platforms and telecom providers to encourage safer user experiences and rapid response to complaints.

### **Community Engagement and Empowerment**

Empowering communities to take an active role in preventing cybercrime is another key responsibility.

- ❖ **Youth Leadership Programs:** Social workers can facilitate youth-led initiatives that promote positive online behavior and peer education.
- ❖ **Safe Spaces Creation:** Establishing safe community centers or online forums where adolescents can seek help without fear of judgment encourages openness and early intervention.
- ❖ **Cultural Sensitivity:** Social workers tailor interventions respecting local cultural and religious values, ensuring that strategies resonate and are sustainable.

### **Research and Continuous Learning**

To stay effective, social workers must keep abreast of evolving cybercrime trends and intervention strategies.

- ❖ **Data Collection and Analysis:** Gathering local data on cybercrime patterns helps social workers design targeted programs.
- ❖ **Training and Professional Development:** Participating in workshops, seminars, and certification courses ensures that social workers are skilled in digital issues and trauma-informed care.
- ❖ **Sharing Best Practices:** Collaborating with national and international bodies allows social workers to adopt successful models and avoid pitfalls.

## **8. Conclusion**

Cybercrime is an increasingly pervasive threat in today's digitally connected world, and adolescents stand among its most vulnerable victims. Their natural curiosity, developmental stage, and increasing engagement with technology expose them to risks ranging from cyber bullying to identity theft and online exploitation. The psychological, social, educational, legal, and other impacts of cybercrime on adolescents are profound and multifaceted, often affecting not just the individual but families and communities as well. Bangladesh, like many countries, faces the dual challenge of rapid technological adoption and gaps in awareness, legal infrastructure, and enforcement. Globally, cybercrime continues to evolve alongside technological advances, demanding constant vigilance and adaptive responses. Social workers occupy a critical role in this landscape. Through education, counseling, advocacy, collaboration, and research, they provide frontline support that can mitigate harm and build resilient communities. The involvement of families, schools, governments, and technology companies, alongside social workers, is essential to create a safer digital environment for adolescents. Moving forward, there must be continuous investment in digital literacy, legal reforms, and interdisciplinary cooperation. Protecting adolescents from cybercrime is not only about preventing criminal acts but about fostering their healthy development in a digital age, empowering them to navigate online spaces safely and confidently.

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