


# The Impact of Cyberbullying on Youth Aged 18-25 in Jenin, Palestine.


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## ABSTRACT

## Original research paper

This study examines cyberbullying as one of the most significant emerging psychological issues in the digital age. It has become increasingly common among youth, causing profound psychological, social, behavioral, and academic effects on both the bully and the victim. Bullying behavior is often seen as a reflection of underlying psychological disturbances in the bully. At the same time, the victim's suffering worsens due to repeated harm inflicted through digital means that are hard to control or confront directly. With the rise of the internet and the development of Web 2.0 technologies, bullying has taken on a new form called cyberbullying. In this context, aggression is carried out through virtual environments using modern communication tools-such as text messages, websites, and hacking personal accounts-with the intent to threaten, blackmail, or defame. Furthermore, the study employed a descriptive, field-based methodology, considered most suitable for analyzing and identifying the features of this phenomenon. A research instrument, in the form of a questionnaire, was developed according to academic standards and under the supervision of statistical experts. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections designed to measure the psychological and social effects resulting from cyberbullying. The primary goal of this study is to highlight the seriousness of this issue, explore its dimensions and negative consequences, and provide recommendations to help reduce its spread within educational and social environments.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, psychological disorders, youth, digital communication, virtual environment, cyber extortion, psychological effects.

## Introduction

Bullying is an important psychological phenomenon that deserves study due to its increasing prevalence in recent decades, particularly among young people. It leaves behind numerous adverse effects at all psychological, social, and academic levels for both the bully and the victim, as bullying behavior is a reflection of numerous psychological disorders within the bully. With the emergence of the second generation of the Internet, new patterns of bullying behavior have emerged that differ from the usual concepts that limit bullying to physical, verbal, or sexual bullying. What is called "cyberbullying" has emerged, which is the latest form of bullying that relies on technological means. Thus, the confrontation between the bully and the victim has shifted from a confrontation to an indirect confrontation that relies on a virtual environment during which the bully employs modern digital technology tools that enable social communication between Internet and smartphone users to direct harm and repeated threats to the victim or to fabricate personal scandals through anonymous accounts, which inflicts psychological harm on the victim. This is done through several methods, such as text messages, websites, and hacking personal accounts, where the bully seizes data or personal photos and practices threats and blackmail against the victim.

## Background and Importance of the Study

**Study Problem:** The study's problem lies in examining the impact of cyberbullying on youth aged 18-25 in the city of Jenin.

**Study Questions:** The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact of cyberbullying on youth aged 18-25 in the city of Jenin?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the 5% significance level in the impact of cyberbullying on youth aged 18-25 in the city of Jenin due to the following variables: (gender, number of family members, educational level, marital status)

## Study Hypotheses:

There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\alpha > 0.05$ ) in the impact of cyberbullying on youth aged 18-25 in the city of Jenin

attributable to demographic variables (gender, number of family members, educational level, marital status) or gender.

## Significance of the Study:

The importance of the study stems from the importance of the topic it addresses, which is crucial for preventing further cases and for raising awareness of the dangers of cyberbullying and its impact on all aspects of psychological, social, professional, and family life. Its importance also stems from the importance of the age group the study examines, namely, youth.

## Definition of Terms:

**Cyberbullying:** The deliberate use of electronic communication to inflict deliberate and repeated harm on an individual (Ange & Goh, 2010).

**Youth:** It is the renewal of life itself and the replenishment of its energetic potential. It is the guaranteed future strategic asset of any society and the foundation of all growth, construction, and renewal. With youth, life itself is renewed and is fundamentally based on the law of transgression and violation (Mustafa, 2016).

**The City of Jenin:** Jenin is considered one of the northern Palestinian cities and one of the cities of the Northern Triangle of Palestine. It is 175 meters above sea level and is approximately 75 km from the capital, Jerusalem, to the north. To the east, it overlooks the Jordan Valley and Marj Ibn Amer to the north (Daadou, 2019).

## Theoretical Framework of the Study

**The History and Evolution of Bullying:** The phenomenon of bullying is considered one of the oldest phenomena in human life, having existed and spread among different peoples in various forms, manifestations, names, and methods. Despite this, interest in its adverse effects, studying it, its causes, motives, forms, and impacts, is considered a modern research trend. Credit for this goes to Dan Ollis, who was the first to formulate and define bullying in the 1970s. Since then, interest in this phenomenon has increased day by day, and relevant authorities have begun to address it in research and study (Al-Makaneen et al., 2018).

The last two decades have witnessed a rapid

technological revolution, accompanied by the development of communication devices, such as computers and mobile devices, and the development and spread of various social media applications. The advent of the internet, smart devices, and their diverse applications has introduced a new form of aggressive behavior among children and adolescents, primarily due to the misuse of these technologies. Bullying has shifted from its traditional form to the use of modern means of communication to practice this behavior, which is known as "bullying." Cyberbullying (Al-Hattab, 2018)

Credit goes to Canadian educator Bill Blasi, who is considered the first to coin and define the term cyberbullying. He defined it as "the use of information and communication technologies to support repeated, deliberate, aggressive behavior by an individual or group with the intent to harm other people" (Cyberbullying, 2013, Arab Center for Cyberspace Research).

**Definition of Traditional Bullying:** Since the beginning of interest in studying the phenomenon of bullying, many definitions of the phenomenon have emerged. The founding father of bullying research, Dan Olweus, defined it as intentional negative actions by one or more students to harm another student, occurring repeatedly and over time. These actions can be verbal, such as threats, reprimands, insults, and teasing, or physical contact, such as hitting, pushing, and kicking, or even without words or physical contact with inappropriate signs and gestures, with the intention and deliberate aim of isolating the victim from the group or refusing to respond to their wishes. It should be noted that there must be an imbalance of physical strength and psychological energy between the bully and the victim (Al-Makanin, 2018). Researcher Rasha Marqa defined bullying as any word, action, or report of an action or gesture intended to harm others or the individual himself. Marqa referred to some definitions of the term, such as the definition of "Coloros," which he defines as: "A conscious, deliberate, voluntary activity intended to harm or cause fear and terror through the threat of assault." (Marqa, 2013).

Amal Youssef defined it as the repeated behavior aimed at harming another person physically, psychologically, socially, verbally, or sexually by one or more individuals, either verbally or physically, to control and humiliate the victim and obtain illegitimate gains from the victim (Al-Afifi, 2013).

Writer Walid Fathi defined it as the use of force, threats,

or coercion to harm and intimidate the victim in order to impose dominance and control over others through aggressive methods(Fathi, 2013).

**Definition of cyberbullying:** With the spread of cyberbullying over the past two decades, many definitions of the concept of cyberbullying have emerged. The first to formulate and define the concept was Canadian teacher and bullying activist Bill Plessy, who defined cyberbullying as the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group to harm other people. In legal dictionaries, cyberbullying is defined as the use of communication technologies to harm others, and the use of internet services and mobile technologies such as web pages, discussion groups, and instant messaging with short text messages to harm others (Arab Center for Cyberbullying Research, 2013).

Researcher Khaled Abu Dah defined it as a form of aggression that relies on modern communication methods and various internet applications to publish posts or comments that cause distress to the victim, promote false news, or send emails to harass the victim to confuse them and cause them a state of moral and material distress (Abu Dah, 2017).

Finally, the Digital Giving Initiative of the Saudi Ministry of Communications defined it as the deliberate, repeated, and hostile use of the internet (email, electronic games, text messages, social media) (Digital Giving Initiative, 2019).(Bacete-García& Ferrer-Martínez, Ruiz-Moreno, 2019).

1- It is deliberate and repeated aggressive behavior over an indefinite period, using electronic devices, toward a victim who is unable to defend themselves easily. Considering the various definitions, we find that they focus on the intentional infliction of electronic harm without the victim's permission, causing psychological distress. Cyberbullying takes many forms, including sending threatening or harassing messages and uploading humiliating images without the victim's permission.

2- Theories Explaining Bullying: Much literature has presented some theoretical approaches to explaining bullying. In this section, we will refer to a group of theories proposed by researcher Amr Darwish and his colleagues, as well as researcher Rasha Marqa, in their study on bullying.

1- Psychoanalytic Theory: The pioneer of this theory

was Sigmund Freud. This theory considers aggression an innate human instinct. Bullying behavior, according to this theory, is explained by the fact that the bully projects his frustrations and negative experiences within the family and school environment onto the victim.

2- Behavioral Theory: This theory focuses on human behavior and its various laws. According to it, bullying behavior, like other behaviors, is acquired according to the laws of learning from the surrounding environment. An environment that encourages and reinforces bullying creates an illusory sense of heroism in the child, which reinforces bullying behavior and its repetition in new situations.

3- Social Learning Theory: According to Albert Bandura, the pioneer of this theory, aggressive behavior is learned from the surrounding environment, like other behaviors. Incorrect upbringing methods play a role in the acquisition of bullying behavior through observation and imitation within the family and surrounding environment (Marqa, 2013).

4- Frustration Theory: The pioneers of this theory were Miller, Caesar, Dollar, and Spacy. The fundamental principle of the theory is the existence of A causal relationship between frustration and aggression. When an individual is unable to achieve a specific goal, they feel frustrated and develop an aggressive response, which can then be directed towards another source.

5- Physiological theory: Proponents of this theory believe that bullying behavior results from damage to the nervous system, brain damage, and a defect in the production of the hormone testosterone, which increases the tendency toward aggression when its production increases in the body.

8- Cognitive Behavioral Counseling Theory: This theory is based on the principle of integration between the individual's cognitive structure and their daily behavior. To change his behavior, his knowledge and beliefs must be modified beforehand. Based on this, the cognitive structure serves as the foundation for both the bully and the victim. It produces in the bully a response to bullying towards his victims. It does not enable the victim to realize and respond positively to protect themselves from being exposed to bullying (Darwish, 2017).

Results, Risks, and Impacts of Bullying: Children and adolescents, especially school-aged children, are the most common victims of bullying, which leaves many lasting effects, especially for victims of cyberbullying.

The most significant psychological effects of cyberbullying include low self-esteem, loss of trust in others, disappointment, and loneliness, along with behavioral disorders, sleep disturbances, and depression. In severe cases, victims resort to self-harm and suicide attempts (Muslim, 2018).

Bullying has a significant impact on education, manifesting in poor achievement, lack of desire to go to school, early return from school, absenteeism, lateness to school in the morning, and school dropout, especially for victims. Furthermore, poor achievement, lack of regular attendance, and the creation of problems by bullies are also noted in the educational process, and the progress of the school is significantly affected by bullying, whether electronic or traditional (Marqa, 2013).

Forms of Cyberbullying: Forms and Methods: Many studies and writings agree on the existence of seven forms of bullying. Electronic bullying begins with electronic anger, followed by electronic harassment, electronic dialogue, electronic humiliation, disguise, exposure, violation of privacy, and exclusion. Here, the bully deliberately and repeatedly directs threats, defamation, slander, ridicule, and mockery at the victim, in addition to attempting to impose social isolation on the victim and involve others and inform them of their actions toward the victim (Abu Al-Dah, 2017).

As for the methods and techniques employed by cyberbullying, those who have addressed this phenomenon agree that they are embodied and carried out through six methods and techniques: (Darwish, 2017).

- 1- Phone calls: These refer to direct or recorded voice calls made by the bully using a telephone, mobile phone, or social media applications, such as WhatsApp, through which the bully deliberately and repeatedly terrorizes and harms the victim, insults, curses, threatens, and intimidates them by publishing their personal information.
- 2- Text messages: In addition to blood, defamation, and insults, text messages often contain threats to reveal the victim's secrets, which the bully knows. They also include blackmailing the victim in exchange for not revealing these secrets or for stopping the blackmail.
- 3- Photos and video clips: Cyberbullies often hack into the victim's accounts and obtain photos, video clips, or audio clips of the victim. They then



threaten and blackmail them in exchange for not publishing them. Alternatively, they publish them themselves to further harm the victim.

- 4- Email: The bully sends a message, and as soon as the victim opens it, the bully takes control of their email and seizes its contents. They then either publish it, blackmail them, or post indecent material on the victim's email.
- 5- Chat rooms and social media applications: The bully contacts and communicates with the victim using fake account names to trap the victim and harm them, or hack their account and blackmail them later.
- 6- Deceptive links: Here, the bully, for example, publishes eye-catching news, and once the victim appears to him, the bully can publish whatever he wants on the victim's website or account.

Strategies to reduce cyberbullying and limit its risks and spread: The reviewed studies, articles, reports, and initiatives agreed on a set of strategies to confront cyberbullying and limit its spread and risks to children and adolescents. The first of these strategies relates to the role of the family and parents, which is represented in tightening supervision over the use of modern technology related to the Internet by children and adolescents, taking into consideration not making the child feel that he is being monitored to protect him from psychological harm that may befall him as a result.

Families also need to build and strengthen bridges of communication with their children, especially at this sensitive age group, to protect them from falling prey to any bully, and to allow them the opportunity to talk about what bothers them and educate them to seek help from their parents and open up to them, in addition to educating them and teaching them the most important principles and methods of safe use of the Internet and social networking applications, and how to protect their accounts and devices, while being careful about teaching them hacking mechanisms so that they do not become or learn how to become bullies (Muslim, 2018).

For the victim, it is recommended to attempt to identify the bully and their motives. Additionally, they should avoid responding to messages, calls, or other communications, preserve evidence, adjust privacy settings, inform their parents, and report the bully to official authorities (Laha website, 2016).

Finally, educational authorities and private educational institutions should launch awareness campaigns about bullying, organize the necessary procedures and

measures to combat this phenomenon, communicate with security agencies and relevant legal authorities, inform parents, whether their child is a victim or a bully, monitor children's behavior in general, and include all schools in educational guidance (Hani, 2018).

As for legal authorities, they have published numerous studies and publications that have addressed the phenomenon of cyberbullying, particularly over the past two years, and have enacted laws criminalizing cyberbullying due to its seriousness, prosecuting bullies, and imposing deterrent penalties on them and their parents. Finally, it is worth noting the similarities and differences between cyberbullying against children and cybercrime. Cybercrime has its distinct characteristics and features. It is transnational and knows no geographical boundaries (Abu Al-Rub, 2018). This characteristic characterizes the phenomenon of cyberbullying, in which the bully can be in one country and the victim in another. Cybercrime is also considered a newly emerging crime (Al-Ajami, 2014).

Here, we find a similarity between cyberbullying and crime in this regard. Bullying is a modern phenomenon that has spread with the development and proliferation of electronic communication and interaction methods and their various applications. Furthermore, committing a cybercrime requires the presence of an electronic device and knowledge of its usage techniques (Al-Afifi, 2013). This is a characteristic that cyberbullying shares with crime. Other characteristics of cybercrime include the speed with which it is carried out and the speed with which it is concealed and destroyed.

Cybercrime is also challenging to prove, as is bullying, especially if the bully deletes and disposes of evidence (Matar, 2016). The difference lies in the mechanisms of action, follow-up, and legal procedures. In cybercrimes, the provisions of the Electronic Crimes Law No. 10 of 2018 are applied to punish and deter the offender. In bullying cases, the procedures involve awareness-raising, prevention, rehabilitation, and reform of the bully, by the Juvenile Protection Law, which takes into account the best interests of the juvenile. Given the aforementioned similarity, all parties in education, various ministries, and the security establishment must make every possible effort to not only limit but also eliminate the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Any failure to perform this role means the presence of large numbers of people who could turn into cybercriminals if the phenomenon of cyberbullying is not combated with

the utmost resolve.

#### Previous Studies

Al-Afifi / Islamic University / Gaza / Palestine (2013) A study entitled "Cybercrimes in Palestinian Legislation": The researcher addressed the topic of cybercrimes in their various forms in Palestinian legislation through three principal axes. The first concerns cybercrime, its definition, forms, nature, and characteristics; the characteristics and attributes of the cybercriminal; an explanation of its forms in Palestinian and Jordanian law; and the legal nature of cybercrimes.

Amer Abdel Nasser Al-Sayed / Kuwait / Journal of Educational Studies (2021) A study entitled "Cyberbullying of the bully and the victim: psychometric characteristics, the relationship between them, and the prevalence rate among university students": The study aimed to develop a scale for cyberbullying of the bully and the victim, determine the prevalence rate among university students (bachelor's and postgraduates), and the relationship between cyberbullying of the bully and the victim. The sample consisted of 381 male and female students from Suez Canal University (42 male and 339 female), with an average age of 22.74 years and a standard deviation of 3.39. The sample included 206 undergraduate students and 175 graduate students.

Amal Youssef, Egypt, 2016: In a study on "Cyberbullying and its Relationship to Internet Addiction in Light of Some Demographic Variables Among Male and Female Applied Education Students in Kuwait," the study aimed to uncover the relationship between cyberbullying and internet addiction in light of some demographic variables among male and female applied education students in Kuwait. The study sample consisted of 140 male and female applied education students, aged 19 to 20. Both cyberbullying and internet addiction scales were designed, and their psychometric properties were calculated. The results indicated statistically significant correlations between cyberbullying and internet addiction.

Masoud Al-Rifai/Kuwait/2012) A study entitled "Self-efficacy and its relationship to the level of bullying among advanced technical secondary education students": This study aimed to determine the relationship between self-efficacy and the level of bullying among advanced technical secondary education students. It also aimed to design indicators for the role of the social worker to enhance self-efficacy

and treat bullying behavior among advanced technical secondary education students. A systematic random sample of (156) individuals from the second, third, and fourth secondary grade students was selected. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship at a significance level of 0.05 between self-efficacy and the level of bullying among advanced technical secondary education students.

Liang Chen et al. (China, 2020) conducted a study titled "Emotional Warmth and Cyberbullying Behaviors of College Students: The Mediation of Trait and Gratitude." Based on social learning theory and the general aggression model, this study aims to explore the relationship between parents' emotional warmth and college students' cyberbullying attitudes and the mediating roles of trait gratitude and empathy. Using a stratified cluster random sampling method, 1,198 college students (716 boys and 482 girls with a mean age of 20.44 years) were tested using the Parenting Styles Instrument subscale, the Core Empathy Scale, the Gratitude Questionnaire, and the Cyberbullying Attitude Questionnaire.

(Wei Wang et al, J Affect, 2019) In a study titled "Cyberbullying and Depression among Chinese College Students: A Moderated Mediation Model of Social Anxiety and Neuroticism," Cyberbullying is a serious social problem that can cause several psychological and behavioral problems for both perpetrators and victims. Previous studies have shown that adolescent victims of cyberbullying are more likely to experience depressive symptoms. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between cyberbullying perpetration and depression, or the mediating and moderating mechanisms underlying this relationship.

#### Study Methodology

**Methodology Used:** The descriptive field method was used due to its suitability for the study purposes. This method is based on describing the characteristics of a specific phenomenon and collecting information about it.

**Study Tool:** A tool was used to identify the effects of bullying. This questionnaire was prepared according to academic specifications under the supervision of statistical experts. It is divided into two sections:

**Section One:** Contains personal data related to the respondent, including a number of variables divided into: (gender, educational level, number of family

members, marital status).

**Section Two:** Includes questionnaire items related to identifying the effects of cyberbullying on youth aged 18-25.

**Study Community:** The study community is defined as all individuals, objects, or persons who constitute the subject of the research problem. It is all elements related

to the study problem to which the researcher seeks to generalize the study results (Hawana, 1999, p. 35). The study community consisted of all youth in the city of Jenin.

**Study Sample:** The study sample consisted of 40 youth from the aforementioned community.

**Table (1) sample demographic characteristics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	26	65.0%
Female	14	35.0%
<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
GCSE and lower	16	40.0%
Bachelor	14	35.0%
Masters	10	25.0%
<b>No. of family members</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 4	8	20.0
4-7	17	42.5
More than 7	15	37.5
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	18	45
Married	11	27.5
Divorced	11	27.5

**Instrument reliability:** The instrument's reliability was verified through statistical processing of the instrument's items, using Cronbach's alpha test on all questionnaire items. The instrument's reliability coefficient was 0.858, which is an appropriate reliability coefficient and meets the study's objectives.

**Statistical processing:** The data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which calculated the instrument's reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Percentages and arithmetic means were extracted for the questionnaire items to answer the study questions. An independent samples t-test and a one-way ANOVA test were also conducted to test the hypotheses and arrive at the study's results.

## Study Results

Results related to the first study question:

Regarding the first question, which reads, "What are the effects of cyberbullying on young people aged 18-25?"

**Social effects:** It ranked first in terms of the highest mean, and read, "Intensity and anxiety. This behavior usually occurs before or after feeling victimized." It had a mean of 4.49 and a strongly agree rating. This may be due to the study sample's awareness that children experience various problems, including stubbornness and anxiety, when meeting their distant parents. These feelings may be the result of the father's incitement or the mother's dissatisfaction with the encounter. As for the lowest arithmetic mean, it was scored for paragraph (9), with an arithmetic mean of 4.02 and a response score of "agree." The paragraph read, "They may also become more aggressive when angry."

The study sample's responses to this paragraph were "agree." This indicates that the study sample believes that bullies suffer from intense anger and are aware of what is happening around them, knowing that they have been hurt by the bullying they have experienced.

As for the overall domain of the first domain, its arithmetic mean was 4.29, with a response score of "agree."

Psychological effects: The response score for this domain was "strongly agree." The following is a detailed explanation of this result:

From the above, it is clear that the highest item in the domain of psychological effects was paragraph (1), with an arithmetic mean of 4.54 and a response score of "strongly agree." The paragraph read as follows:

Victims become less engaged with their friends.

From the responses of the study sample, it is evident that one of the most significant effects of cyberbullying on victims is the children's isolation from their friends and their lack of interaction with them due to the trauma they feel as a result of the bullying. They are constantly sad and isolated from their peers.

As for the lowest mean, it was for paragraph (3), with a mean of 4.00 and a response score of "agree." The paragraph read: "Lack of interest in communicating with others."

The study sample members' responses to this paragraph were "agree," as the study sample unanimously reported suffering from feelings of isolation, loneliness, and introversion, as they do not prefer to share or socialize with others, thus reducing their desire to communicate with others. As for the overall domain, the mean was 4.29, and a response score of "strongly agree."

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cyberbullying is a serious phenomenon that negatively impacts youth in Jenin, Palestine, particularly those aged 18-25. The study concluded that exposure to cyberbullying leads to severe psychological and social consequences, such as anxiety, depression, social isolation, and low self-esteem. It also impacts on the youth's academic and job performance.

Despite the importance of the study's findings, it faced several research limitations, most notably the geographical limitation of the sample to the city of Jenin, which may limit the possibility of generalizing the results to other Palestinian cities, which differ in their social and economic nature. Furthermore, the focus on the 18-25 age group overlooked other groups vulnerable to cyberbullying, such as adolescents and even older adults, who have become more frequent internet users. Furthermore, the study encountered difficulties in collecting data due to some victims' reluctance to disclose their experiences for fear of social

stigma or lack of trust in the confidentiality of information. Furthermore, some of the bullies themselves may have been part of the sample, which may have led to inaccurate answers. Finally, the study relied heavily on questionnaires and interviews, which may not always reflect the true feelings of participants due to reservations or fear of prejudice.

As for the recommendations, multi-level action is needed to combat this phenomenon, starting with raising awareness through the media and educational institutions to clarify the dangers of bullying and its legal implications, followed by establishing helplines and specialized psychological support centers for victims of cyberbullying, and reaching greater cooperation between government agencies and internet service providers to monitor cases and implement deterrent penalties. It is also recommended to involve families in monitoring the content their children are exposed to, while promoting a culture of reporting bullying without fear. Finally, there is an urgent need for further studies that include larger samples and employ diverse methodologies (such as longitudinal or cross-regional comparative studies) to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of cyberbullying in the Palestinian context.

In conclusion, curbing cyberbullying is not an individual responsibility, but rather a collective effort that requires concerted legal, educational, and psychological efforts to create a safe digital environment where youth's dignity is preserved and their mental health is safeguarded. Hope remains for building an informed generation capable of using technology positively, free from harm and exploitation.

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### Web resources

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