PIRQE ABOT, Rabbi Eliezer on character assassination

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Rabbi Eliezer from the city of Modi'in says in Pirqe Abot that when a person embarrasses someone else in public, he might loss his share in the world to come, the afterlife. He emphasizes that even thought the perpetrator might be a fully observant Jew and a kind and generous person, if he is abusive, offends or embarrasses someone else publicly, he looses his part in the next world. Why such a terrible punishment for something apparently so trivial? For the rabbis embarrassing, offending or bullying a person in public, is not a small thing. They actually compare this type of abusive behavior with "murdering".

Like murdering, public embarrassment is a sin beyond repair. It could happen in our work place or even to our children at school or in the bus. These *crimes* could go unseen for a long time, because many times the victims of bullying, especially if they suffer from low self esteem, usually do not denounce the perpetrators (and low self-esteem gets lower as an effect of this bullying. Do you see the vicious cycle here?). Maimonides (Hilkhot Teshuba 3:14) explains that in order to prevent these destructive behaviors, the rabbis warned us that embarrassing or offending someone else, carries the maximum possible penalty: loosing our afterlife.

Surprisingly, it seems that today general society has arrived to the same conclusion as the Rabbis of the Talmud in terms of the similarities between verbal offenses and murder. The following is a priceless text quoted directly from Wikipedia ("Character assassination") which captures what the Talmud explained in the 5th Century. *"For living individuals targeted by character assassination attempts, this may result in being rejected by their community, family, or members of their living or work environment. Such acts are often difficult to reverse or rectify, and the process is likened to a literal assassination of a human life. The damage sustained can last a lifetime or, for historical figures, for many centuries after their death."*