

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CYBERBULLYING VICTIMIZATION

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**Abstract**

*This study is proposed after seeing the rapid use of social media as a medium to bully each other regardless of male or female, which is feared to invite prejudice, mutual hatred, and hostility. The public is concerned about the content of messages and comments that are misleading, slanderous, and disgraceful. Therefore, this study could see gender differences that invite implications for cyberbullying among university students. The study involves a sample of 150 respondents from public and private university students in Malaysia. Data was collected using an online survey by filling out the Google Form based on a self-administered survey questionnaire. The data obtained were analyzed using the software Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. and Mann–Whitney U-test to test the hypothesis in examining cyberbullying victimization based on gender differences. A Mann-Whitney test showed no significant differences between the scores of cyberbullying victimization and gender differences. The male group (n=18) and female group (n=122) is not statistically significant, Mann-Whitney U (1510.500) = -0.959,  $\rho = 0.338$ . The finding from this study is necessary to create awareness among university management, parents, and peers to exercise their role in protecting young adults from being a cyberbullying victim.*

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, cyberbullying victimization, gender, university student, Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is identified as one of the detrimental behaviours associated with technology abuse. As technology keeps evolving, cyberbullying will gradually affect youths, and this problem remains a social issue (Paez, 2020). This issue has become a public health concern that may increase the risk of mental health problems, including suicide ideation and developmental and psychological issues (Garrett et al., 2016). Indeed, a reality of life exists in larger communities, which results in adverse consequences for children, adolescents and adults (Redmond et al., 2020).

In the digital age, university students are considered ‘digital natives’ in which technology has become an integral and normalized part of their daily life (Myers & Cowie, 2017). They are the most vulnerable group to involve with cyberbullying activities as they access the Internet for a wide variety of purposes such as education, entertainment, and social communication. In addition, incidence rates of cyberbullying among emerging adults and college students are increasing, which may reflect a continuation of bullying behaviour from high school but in a different context, which is digital (Almenayes, 2017).

Indeed, cyberbullying has become a common issue among young adults, especially university students, but there is a lack of investigation into this problem in higher education that contributes largely unexplored on its correlation (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2019; Peled, 2019; Tennant et al., 2015; Yubero et al., 2017). Currently, there are enormous studies that have focused on cyberbullying in an adolescent group (e.g., middle and high school students). On the contrary, a smaller quantity of research has been carried out on the older cohort, such as university students and working adults (Balakrishnan, 2018; Martínez-Monteaagudo et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

While numerous studies have investigated both the perpetrators and targets of cyberbullying, victims have been of primary interest because of the more significant adverse effects associated with cyberbullying (Extremera et al., 2018; Peluchette et al., 2015). In recent studies, researchers found that university students’ cyberbullying victims have exhibited psychological impairments that affected their daily lives (Mallik & Radwan, 2020; Martínez-Monteaagudo et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). The effects of cyberbullying victimization are more severe than bullying in four different ways due to the anonymity of the perpetrator, fast information sharing, the more significant number of bullies, the record of bullying remaining online long-term or permanently (Anderson, Bresnahan, & Musatics, 2014; Dredge, Gleeson, & De La Piedad Garcia, 2014). Furthermore, the unknown identity of the bullies has made the victim suffer from feelings of pressure, terror, and other adverse effects (Chao & Yu, 2017). Cyberbullying activities can happen anywhere and anytime that is hard to protect themselves in the online world (Mallik & Radwan, 2020).

Various studies have focused on cyberbullying as it poses risks to individuals from gender differences. Although the findings in the literature regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying by gender are inconsistent, one of the recent conclusions is that males are more likely to conduct cyberbullying, whereas females are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying as a victim

(Gönültaş, 2022; Khine et al., 2020). In addition, a longitudinal study by (Lee et al., 2022) also found somewhat different developmental patterns of cyberbullying victimization by gender.

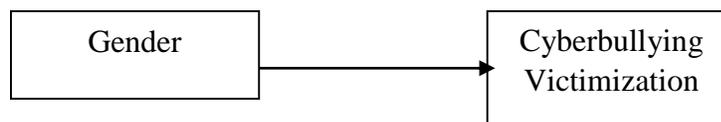
Although a growing number of studies have examined the mechanisms of cyberbullying victimization, less is known about the gender differences in the developmental nature of cyberbullying victimization (Lee, Harris & Kim, 2022). Besides, there is a lack of studies investigating the gender differences in various types of cyberbullying, such as perpetrators or bully/victims among university students (Khine et al., 2020). To understand cyberbullying issues, this study wants to investigate cyberbullying victimization based on gender differences. The objective of the study is to address these gaps by raising and answering a research question.

RQ1. Are there gender differences in cyberbullying victimization?

This study provides theoretical and practical contributions to the existing body of literature. First, the study addresses cyberbullying to gain a deeper understanding of cyberbullying victimization in university settings. Second, this study enriches the current research by examining the role of gender in cyberbullying issues. Finally, the present study provides empirical evidence for university management and authorities to create new or strengthen the existing guidelines or policies regarding cyberbullying cases, which help students to reduce the risks of exposure to cyberbullying victimization and subsequently avoid the adverse impacts of cyberbullying.

## THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following figure 1.0 presents the proposed model of cyberbullying victimization. This model investigates the issue of cyberbullying victimization based on gender differences. The dependent variable of this study is cyberbullying victimization, and gender represents the independent variable.



**Figure 1:** The Theoretical Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Selected Sample

The reason is that young adults have been found particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying victimization. As stated by Balakrishnan (2015), the prevalence of cyberbullies and cyber victims in Malaysia was noted in young adults and the predictor of cyber-victimization and cyberbullying is internet frequency. Thus, young adults have a high chance of experiencing cyberbullying as they spend more time on the internet. Hence, university students are more likely to suffer from cyberbullying when they heavily use the internet for academic, social interaction and recreational purposes. For this study, the targeted respondents concentrated on recruiting 150 students from Malaysia's public and private universities.

### Research design

This study's research design is quantitative and employs a cross-sectional study. The respondents were selected by using a convenience sampling technique. This study employs a cross-sectional design to examine gender differences in cyberbullying victimization based on quantitative research. Gray (2014)'s cross-sectional study involves obtaining data to make inferences about a target population at one specific point in time. This study adopts a cross-sectional design due to the timeframes for research. Though the researcher acknowledges the limitation of this cross-sectional study, employing other research designs, such as a longitudinal study, might delay the timeframe of the present study. Nevertheless, it allows the researcher to collect data for multiple variables simultaneously, as the outcomes can be used as a basis for further research.

### Data collection Procedure

This present study employed a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) as a tool for data collection. Lavrakas (2008) described a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) as a survey instrument or questionnaire purposefully designed to be answered by a sample without researcher interference. Furthermore, this study deploys an internet survey to obtain the data due to the purpose of other forms of self-administered surveys. It allows the respondents to answer the questions with sincerer and more honesty as they are freely able to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. Therefore, the data was collected using an online survey by filling out the google form based on a self-administered survey questionnaire.

### Measures

This study used self-administered survey questions related to the research context, and the nature of the items was adapted from various validated items in prior studies. The constructs were rated on 7-point Likert scales with options including from disagree (1 to agree (7) strongly7). The 8-items for cyberbullying victimization were adapted from Tynes, Rose, & Williams (2010). Thus, Table 1 displays the items for the construct of cyberbullying victimization.

**Table 1:** The General Online Victimization Scale Item

Item	Statement
CV1	People have said negative things (like rumours or name-calling) about how I look, act or dress online.
CV2	People have said mean or rude things about the way that I talk (write) online.
CV3	People have posted mean or rude things about me on the internet
CV4	I have been harassed or bothered online for no apparent reason
CV5	I have been harassed or bothered online because of something that happened at school.
CV6	I have been harassed or humiliated online.
CV7	I have been bullied online
CV8	I was threatened online because of the way I looked, acted, or dressed

## Data analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software version 21 to discover the respondents' demographic information. This study used the Mann–Whitney U-test to test the hypothesis in examining cyberbullying victimization based on gender differences.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Information

The data have shown that 131 university students participated in this study. The target population was 18–27-years old young adults who actively use the internet for a different purpose. Besides, the percentage of student gender indicated that 18.7 per cent (18) were male students, whereas 81.3 per cent (122) were females. Similarly, 45.3 per cent of 68 students used the internet for more than 8 hours based on daily internet usage. In addition, the result found that 38.0 per cent of respondents accessed the internet for education purposes, followed by 29.3 per cent for entertainment. Table 2 present the demographic information of the participants.

**Table 2:** Demographic Information

Categories	Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	18.7
	Female	122	81.3
Internet usage (Daily hour)	Less than 2 hours	6	4.0
	3 hours	4	2.7
	4 hours	11	7.3
	5 hours	20	13.3

	6 hours	23	15.3
	7 hours	7	4.7
	8 hours	11	7.3
	More than 8 hours	68	45.3
Internet usage (purpose)	Education	58	38.0
	Online Shopping	1	0.7
	Social Network Site (SNS)	36	24.0
	Entertainment	44	29.3
	Others	11	7.3

### Gender differences in Cyberbullying victimization

To address the research question, the study investigated whether levels of cyberbullying and victimization differ according to gender. The Mann–Whitney U-Test was used to examine whether a significant difference exists in the scores between cyberbullying victimization by gender. Table 3 present the result.

**Table 3:** Mann–Whitney U-test Results on Differences in Scores for Cyberbullying Victimization by Gender

Variable	Gender	n	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	Z	ρ
Cyberbullying victimization	Male	18	82.55	2311.5	1510.500	-0.959	0.338
	Female	122	73.88	9013.50			

A Mann-Whitney test showed no significant differences between the scores of cyberbullying victimization and gender differences. The male group(n=18) and female group (n=122) is not statistically significant, Mann-Whitney U (1510.500) = -0.959, ρ = 0.338.

### DISCUSSION

This study discovered that cyberbullying victimization among university students does not differ significantly by gender. Every student is at higher risk of being involved as a victim of cyberbullying, regardless of gender. Surprisingly, the results of the finding of this study are inconsistent with the previous studies, whereas females are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying as a victim (Gönültaş, 2022; Khine et al., 2020).

Although gender differences were not related to cyberbullying victimization, this issue can have severe negative consequences. Furthermore, victims of cyberbullying become powerless as cyberbullying can happen anywhere and anytime that is hard to protect themselves in the online

world (Mallik & Radwan, 2020). Besides, the unknown identity of the bullied has made the victim suffer from feelings of pressure, terror, and other adverse effects (Chao & Yu, 2017). Thus, victims have a hard time reporting cyberbullying because they do not know who their perpetrator is (DePaolis & Williford, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2019). Hence, Lee & Chun (2020) stated that the impact of cyberbullying victimization had been linked to various issues in a personal and social context.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The finding from this study is necessary to create awareness among university management, parents, and peers to exercise their role in protecting young adults from being a cyberbullying victim. In addition, the administration of the university, such as counsellors and fellow academics, must take urgent steps to combat this issue by establishing a strict anti-cyberbullying policy, emotional training, and prevention programs. In addition, effective communication with parents hinders the child from becoming a cyberbullying victim, and those with support from peers are at lower risk of being cyberbullied than those without peer support (Boniel-Nissim & Sasson, 2018; Fridh et al., 2015). To prevent and mitigate cyberbullying issues, reforms should focus not only on the individual level but also on holistic inclusion among family and peers (Bayraktar et al., 2015).

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION**

This chapter identifies the absence of a standard cyberbullying measurement scale suitable for the Malaysian context as a challenge and limitation. The scale adopted in this study, which was used in the United States (Mitchell & Jones 2011) and various European countries (Livingstone et al. 2012), has been suitably reliable in those contexts and has produced predictable results. However, the findings of the current study have instead been unpredicted.

This study is only limited to a quantitative approach. Hence, this chapter recommends that future research should focus on the qualitative approach in the Malaysian context. Qualitative data can be used to observe the causal relationships between cyberbullying and other social factors such as demographics or parent relationships. Therefore, future research should explore the relationships between cyberbullying and demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and parental attachments. This approach is expected to generate a new and reliable cyberbullying scale for Malaysian society. Qualitative methodologies studies such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, content analysis and audio recordings can provide valuable insights and facilitate a more precise interpretation of factors affecting cyberbullying among Malaysian youth (Festl & Quandt 2013).

This study focuses on the cyber victim (being a victim of cyberbullying) dimension only because most Malaysian students that have got get involved in cyberbullying acts have been victims rather than bullies (Balakrishnan 2015). However, to get a comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying, future research should investigate the effect of cyberbullying on other parties

involved in the behaviour, namely the bully, the bully-victim and the bystander (audience) (Camacho, Hassanein & Head 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The cyberbullying victimization phenomenon is a crucial social issue requiring more in-depth investigation. Based on the findings and support from past studies, cyberbullying is disturbing among higher education students as it can adversely affect the victim's mental and psychological well-being. Regardless of gender, victims of cyberbullying may suffer physical, cognitive, or psychological consequences. The outcome of this study could assist stakeholders of higher education institutions and parents in identifying critical issues and developing effective interventions to reduce cyberbullying among university students.

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