STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN HEALTH CAMPUS OF UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA.

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by

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**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated and duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at Universiti Sains Malaysia or other institutions. I grant Universiti Sains Malaysia the right to use the dissertation for teaching, research and promotional purposes.

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 "NIK NUR RAFIFAH EZLYN BINTI MOHD RIDZUAN"

Date: 3rd August 2025

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USM   Universiti Sains Malaysia

RCBS   Revised Cyberbullying Survey

DASS-21   Depression Anxiety Stress Scale – 21

GST   General Strain Theory

HREC   Human Research Ethics Committee

HPUSM   Hospital Pakar Universiti Sains Malaysia

BHEPA   Bahagian Hal Ehwal dan Pembangunan Pelajar

SPSS   Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CGPA   Cumulative Grade Point Average

SMS   Short Message Service

IPS   Institute of Postgraduate Studies

SPiReSS   Strategic Program in the Research Support Service

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ABSTRAK

Siberbuli kini menjadi isu yang semakin membimbangkan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti berikutan peningkatan penggunaan platform digital untuk urusan akademik dan sosial. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti kelaziman siberbuli serta hubungannya dengan status kesihatan mental dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah di Kampus Kesihatan Universiti Sains Malaysia. Reka bentuk kajian keratan rentas telah digunakan, melibatkan seramai 312 pelajar yang dipilih melalui pensampelan mudah berstrata. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan soal selidik kendiri yang merangkumi maklumat demografi, Soal Selidik Siberbuli yang Diubah Suai (RCBS), dan Skala Kemurungan, Kebimbangan dan Tekanan-21 (DASS-21). Analisis statistik dijalankan menggunakan perisian SPSS versi 28.0. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa 278 pelajar (89.1%) pernah mengalami siberbuli. Terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara siberbuli dengan umur ($p = 0.015$), jantina ($p < 0.001$), pendapatan isi rumah ($p = 0.030$), prestasi akademik ($p < 0.001$), dan sekolah pengajian ($p = 0.003$). Pelajar yang mengalami siberbuli melaporkan tahap kemurungan ($M = 8.20$, $SD = 4.59$), kebimbangan ($M = 8.53$, $SD = 4.18$), dan tekanan ($M = 8.48$, $SD = 4.26$) yang lebih tinggi, dengan semua nilai $p < 0.001$. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menekankan kadar siberbuli yang tinggi dan kesannya terhadap kesihatan mental pelajar, justeru menunjukkan keperluan segera untuk intervensi awal, program kesedaran, dan perkhidmatan sokongan mental yang mudah diakses di peringkat universiti.

STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN HEALTH CAMPUS OF UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA.

ABSTRACT

This Cyberbullying has emerged as a serious concern among university students due to the growing reliance on digital platforms for academic and social interaction. This study aimed to determine the prevalence of cyberbullying and its association with mental health among undergraduate students at the Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia. A cross-sectional design was employed, involving 312 students selected through stratified convenience sampling. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire comprising demographic details, the Revised Cyberbullying Survey (RCBS), and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 28.0. Results revealed that 278 students (89.1%) had experienced cyberbullying. Significant associations were found between cyberbullying and age ($p = 0.015$), gender ($p < 0.001$), household income ($p = 0.030$), academic performance ($p < 0.001$), and school of study ($p = 0.003$). Cyberbullied students reported significantly higher levels of depression (M = 8.20, SD = 4.59), anxiety (M = 8.53, SD = 4.18), and stress (M = 8.48, SD = 4.26), with all p-values < 0.001. In conclusion, this study highlights the high prevalence of cyberbullying and its significant impact on students' mental health, underscoring the urgent need for early intervention, awareness programs, and accessible mental health services in university settings.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to study on mental health impact of cyberbullying among university students in health campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia. The study's background is outlined in this chapter, which is followed by a thorough problem statement, research questions, and objectives. The study's hypotheses, significance of the research, and the operational definitions of important terms used throughout the research will also be described.

1.2   Background of Study

The internet and social media are becoming essential components of young people's daily lives in the digital age, especially for undergraduates (Peled, 2019). These platforms facilitate contact and information sharing in a variety of ways, but they also expose users to unfavourable situations, such as cyberbullying (Peled, 2019). Cyberbullying is when someone uses technology to threaten, harass, shame, or specifically target another individual (Ben-Joseph, 2022). In contrast to traditional bullying, it can occur anywhere, at any time, and frequently in front of a larger audience (Madison Web Solutions, 2014).

The prevalence of cyberbullying has been a growing concern worldwide. Studies indicate that a substantial proportion of university students experience some form of cyberbullying during their academic life. According to a research conducted by Poole (2017) among 201 students from sixteen different universities in the United States, 85.2% of the 201 replies received by college students indicated that they have experienced cyberbullying, and similar trends have been reported among university

students. In Malaysia, Balakrishnan (2015) found that 39.7% of university students reported being victims of cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying is digital, it can reach a larger audience, making it a widespread problem that impacts a sizable section of the institution's student population. The high prevalence rates highlight the need for further thorough investigation to fully grasp the extent of this issue in the context of higher education.

Numerous factors contribute to cyberbullying, which is frequently impacted by the accessibility and anonymity offered by digital platforms. Cyberbullying is common because of a number of risk factors, such as digital literacy, social dynamics, and personality features (Zhong et al., 2021). Anonymity is crucial because people are more prone to act hostilely when they believe it is difficult to identify them (Kim et al., 2023). Furthermore, people may engage in cyberbullying because to social factors including peer pressure, a desire for vengeance, or a drive to establish dominance. Additionally, research has shown that those who have experienced bullying themselves may turn to cyberbullying as a coping mechanism (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023).

Being a member of a minority group, having a significant online presence, and displaying specific vulnerabilities like anxiety or low self-esteem are risk factors that raise the likelihood of becoming the victim of cyberbullying. Age, gender, and financial status are some of the variables that can affect a person's risk of becoming the victim of or engaging in cyberbullying. Males may be bullied for their academic performance or social status, but girls are frequently the subject of harassment that centers on looks (Tokunaga, 2010). Developing successful measures to stop cyberbullying requires an understanding of these risk factors.

The mental health effects of cyberbullying are profound and long-lasting. Victims often face mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Studies among Malaysian undergraduate medical students showed that 23.8% had symptoms of depression, 51.6% anxiety, and 15.9% stress at the start of the semester (Lee et al., 2023; Hajira Ramlan et al., 2020). A meta-analysis by Kowalski et al. (2014) confirmed that those exposed to cyberbullying experience higher levels of psychological distress. The anonymity and persistent nature of online bullying can lead to feelings of helplessness, isolation, and severe mental health issues (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Alghamdi et al. (2024) found a strong link between cyberbullying and increased stress, anxiety, and depression among college students, indicating its detrimental impact on mental health.

Faryadi (2011) also highlighted that cyberbullying negatively affects victims' mental and physical well-being, leading to severe stress and difficulties focusing on academics. This can hinder academic performance, as 85% of respondents in a Malaysian survey reported that cyberbullying affected their grades and overall performance. Additionally, the survey revealed that 85% of students agreed bullying had severe emotional effects, causing significant psychological issues.

Since its undergraduate students are frequent internet users, Universiti Sains Malaysia is not exempt from these problems. The purpose of this study is to investigate the mental health effects of cyberbullying on USM undergraduate students and to shed light on its frequency and effects.

1.3   Problem Statement

With the rapid expansion of digital technology and social media platforms, cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue affecting students worldwide. University

students, who are in a critical stage of social and academic development, are especially vulnerable to online harassment (Peled, 2019). At the Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), where the majority of students rely heavily on digital platforms for communication, social interaction, and academic purposes, the risk of cyberbullying is particularly pronounced. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time, in any location, and often without the physical presence of the perpetrator (Madison Web Solutions, 2014). This creates a persistent sense of vulnerability, as victims may feel they are unable to escape the harassment even in their personal, "safe" environments (Madison Web Solutions, 2014).

Cyberbullying has far-reaching mental health consequences. According to Aparisi et al., (2021), victims often experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem. These mental health effects can interfere with academic performance, lead to social isolation, and diminish overall well-being. In extreme cases, cyberbullying has been linked to suicidal ideation and other severe mental health outcomes. However, despite the severity of these potential impacts, cyberbullying remains underreported in many academic environments, and its true extent within the Health Campus of USM is largely unknown. Many students may be unaware of how to report incidents or fear retaliation if they do report it.

There is limited study on cyberbullying in Malaysia. In 2013, a local newspaper recorded 389 incidences of cyberbullying. The number of cases increased by 55.6% from 250 in 2012 (Lai et al., 2017). However, this data number does not accurately reflect the prevalence of cyberbullying in Malaysia. According to Lai et al. (2017), they believe that the actual number of cyberbullying occurrences is significantly higher than recorded ones. Victims of cyberbullying may have silenced themselves due to

feelings of depression, embarrassment, and helplessness, or a lack of knowledge about reporting incidences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Additionally, studies from Faryadi (2011) have demonstrated that cyberbullying harms the mental and physical well-being of helpless victims, with 365 first-year students found that 85% of the participants said that cyberbullying had an impact on their grades and overall academic performance. A recent study from Mohd Fauzi et al., (2024) also conduct a study regarding cyberbullying victimization and its effect on mental health indicated that emotional impact of cyberbullying varies based on individual with different circumstances with having 36.6% of students with experience being cyberbullied and 19.6% students being cyberbullied every day.

The lack of comprehensive data on cyberbullying at the Health Campus of USM poses a significant barrier to addressing the issue effectively. Without a clear understanding of the prevalence and psychological effects of cyberbullying, university administrators, counsellors, and mental health professionals are unable to develop targeted interventions or support systems for affected students. Moreover, there is a need to understand how different demographic factors, such as gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school of study, may influence vulnerability to cyberbullying.

This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the prevalence of cyberbullying and its mental health impact on university students at Health Campus of USM. Understanding the extent and effects of cyberbullying is essential for developing tailored interventions, raising awareness, and creating a safer digital environment for students. Without such knowledge, the university risks neglecting a critical factor affecting student mental health and academic success

1.4   Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

i.   What is the prevalence of experience in cyberbullying among university students at Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia?

ii.   What are demographic factors that influence the likelihood of being a victim of cyberbullying?

iii.   What are the impact of cyberbullying on mental health status among university students in Health Campus, USM?

1.5   Research Objectives

1.5.1   General Objective

The general objective of this study is to determine prevalence of cyberbullying and determine the impact of cyberbullying toward mental health status among university students at Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

1.5.2   Specific Objectives

The specific objectives for this study are as follows:

i.   To determine the prevalence of experience in cyberbullying among university students in the Health Campus of USM.

ii.   To determine the association between demographic factors (gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school of study) with cyberbullying among university students in Health Campus, USM.

iii. To determine the association between cyberbullying and mental health status (anxiety, depression, and stress) among university students in Health Campus, USM.

1.6 Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 (H_0): There is no significant association between cyberbullying and mental health status (anxiety, depression, and stress) among university students at Health Campus of USM.

(H_1): There is a significant association between cyberbullying and mental health status (anxiety, depression, and stress) among university students at Health Campus of USM.

Hypothesis 2 (H_0): There is no significant association between demographic factors (gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school of study) and cyberbullying among university students at Health Campus of USM.

(H_2): There is a significant association between demographic factors (gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school of study) and cyberbullying among university students at Health Campus of USM.

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1.7   Significance of study

This study is significant in multiple ways, contributing both to academic research and practical applications in addressing cyberbullying. First, it provides valuable insights into the mental health challenges faced by university students in response to cyberbullying, a growing concern in the digital age. By focusing on Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), this research helps to contextualize cyberbullying within a Malaysian university setting, which has unique cultural, social, and technological dynamics that may influence both the occurrence and the impact of cyberbullying.

Moreover, the study aims to bridge a critical gap between theoretical knowledge and practical interventions. Understanding the mental health impacts on students can inform mental health support services at USM, leading to tailored counselling programs and preventive measures that specifically address the emotional aftermath of cyberbullying. For instance, insights from the study could drive the development of on-campus workshops and awareness campaigns that educate students on how to recognize, prevent, and cope with cyberbullying. Additionally, findings could contribute to establishing more robust policies within the university's student welfare framework, ensuring that both victims and bystanders are adequately supported.

Finally, this study can serve as a reference for future research in other academic institutions, both within Malaysia and globally. By revealing trends and mental health consequences specific to the university context, it could encourage comparative studies that investigate cyberbullying in different cultural and educational settings.

Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of mental well-being in educational environments, where addressing cyberbullying is not merely a matter of discipline, but also essential to protecting students' mental health.

1.8 Definitions of Operational Terms

There operational terms used in this research proposal are shown below：

Table 3.1 Definitions of Operational Terms

	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition
Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying is a form of bullying in which one or more people purposefully and persistently harm another person via the use of digital technologies (Sheldon, 2022).	It is described as a digital version of in-person bullying and frequently involves actions like intimidation and harassment via social media and other digital means (Greenwood et al., 2015). This study assessed the prevalence of experience in cyberbullying using the Revised Cyberbullying Survey (RCBS) (Peled, 2019).
Mental health status	A person's ability to manage life's challenges, reach their full potential, study and work effectively, and give back to their community is known as their	This study assessed mental health status using Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) (Lovibond &

	mental health (World Health Organization, 2022).	Lovibond, 1995; Henry & Crawford, 2005).
University students	University students are those who enroll in courses offered by universities or other higher education institutions (What Is University Students | IGI Global, n.d.) .	University students in this study refer specifically to those currently enrolled in any courses or programmes at Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia during the data collection period.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

Cyberbullying is a prevalent issue that has gained significant attention due to its psychological effects on individuals, particularly among university students. This literature review examines the existing research on the nature of cyberbullying, its prevalence among university students, the associated demographic factors (gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school), and its impact on mental health, including depression, anxiety, and stress. The final section of this chapter will describe the theoretical and conceptual framework used in this study.

2.2   Cyberbullying: Definition

Cyberbullying is defined as any form of bullying or harassment that occurs via electronic communication platforms, including social media, messaging apps, and other online environments (Lee et al., 2023). Unlike traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time, in any location, and often without the physical presence of the perpetrator (Madison Web Solutions, 2014). This creates a persistent sense of vulnerability, as victims may feel they are unable to escape the harassment even in their personal, "safe" environments (Madison Web Solutions, 2014). Another way to describe cyberbullying is as an aggressive, persistent, and deliberate act of harming someone else by contacting them via electronic means over an extended period of time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Smith, 2009).

2.3   Types of Cyberbullying from Different Platform

Cyberbullying manifests differently across platforms, with unique tactics exploiting the specific functionalities of each medium. These are the most popular and widespread media platforms where cyberbullying can take place:

Electronic mail (email): A way of sending digital messages from an author to one or more receivers (Peled, 2019). Emails are often used for harassment through threatening or abusive messages, impersonation to spread harmful content, or overwhelming victims with spam and malware to cause distress (Abdullah & Rauf, 2017).

Instant messaging: A kind of online conversation that allows two people to text each other in real time (Peled, 2019). In instant messaging, bullies send direct, offensive messages in real-time, often impersonating the victim or flooding them with messages to annoy or intimidate.

Chat rooms: Online spaces where people can interact in real time with strangers who have similar interests or other connections (Peled, 2019). In chat rooms, cyberbullying may include public humiliation, such as posting derogatory comments in group discussions, deliberate exclusion, or group targeting to collectively harass a victim (Stopbullying.gov, 2021).

Text messaging (SMS): Constructing and transmitting a short electronic message between two or more mobile phones is known as text messaging (SMS) (Peled, 2019). Through text messaging, bullies may send threatening messages, use group texts to spread false rumours, or share inappropriate images of the victim without consent (Bergman, 2024).

Social networking sites: Platforms that allow people who share interests, hobbies, backgrounds, or real-world connections to develop social networks or

relationships (Peled, 2019). On social networking sites, tactics include public shaming through hurtful posts, impersonating victims by creating fake profiles, or trolling with provocative comments aimed at causing distress.

Websites: Platforms that offer services for corporate, governmental, or private use (Peled, 2019). Websites can be used for defamation by creating harmful blogs or forums, doxing by publishing private information to incite harassment, or engaging in cyberstalking to monitor and intimidate victims over time (Douglas, 2016).

These diverse behaviours highlight the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying and its potential for significant harm. According to Beebe (2010), undergraduate students are cyberbullied most frequently via email and least frequently in chat rooms. According to other studies, instant messaging is the most popular electronic channel for cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2019).

2.4 Prevalence of Cyberbullying Among University Students

The majority of studies on cyberbullying is focused on schoolchildren and has been connected to traditional bullying (Cassidy et al., 2013). Cyberbullying among children and adolescents is on the rise, according to mounting data. According to Zhu et al. (2021)'s systematic review, the prevalence of cyberbullying victimization ranged from 13.99 to 57.5%, while the prevalence of cyberbullying perpetration among children and adolescents ranged from 6.0 to 46.3%. Schoolchildren and teenagers are not the only demographics affected by cyberbullying; university students and young adults are also affected, with prevalence rates ranging from 3 to 40% for perpetrators and 7 to 62% for victims (Faucher et al., 2014). The fact that a significant portion of cyberbullies were also cybervictims complicates this issue. According to Lozano-Blasco et al. (2020)'s meta-analysis, there is a moderate-to-high connection (r = 0.428)

between being a cyberbully and a cybervictim. Furthermore, in addition to academic challenges, university students frequently face other mental health issues (Zhang, 2022).

According to earlier research, between 9% and 34% of college students had experienced cyberbullying (Baldasare et al., 2012). Dılmaç (2009) found that 55.35% of the 666 students at Selcuk University in Turkey claimed having been the victim of cyberbullying at least once in their lives, while 22.5% of them reported cyberbullying another person at least once. A research by Beebe (2010) involved 202 American college students. According to the findings, 50.7% of the undergraduate students in the sample said they had been the victim of cyberbullying at least once while attending college. Furthermore, among college students, 36.3% reported being a victim of cyberbullying on a monthly basis. According to Walker et al. (2011), 11% of the 131 students in seven undergraduate classes in the United States who participated in the survey reported having been the victim of cyberbullying while attending college. Facebook accounted for 64% of those, followed by cell phones (43%), and instant messaging (43%). 43% of students said they had no idea who was cyberbullying them, 57% said it was someone from outside the university, and 50% said it was their classmates. According to a research conducted by Poole (2017) among 201 students from sixteen different universities in the United States, 85.2% of the 201 replies received by college students indicated that they have experienced cyberbullying. Victims of cyberbullying ranged from sporadic occurrences to nearly daily experiences.

There is limited study on cyberbullying in Malaysia. In 2013, a local newspaper recorded 389 incidences of cyberbullying. The number of cases increased by 55.6% from 250 in 2012 (Lai et al., 2017). However, this number does not accurately reflect

the prevalence of cyberbullying in Malaysia. According to Lai et al. (2017), they believe that the actual number of cyberbullying occurrences is significantly higher than recorded ones. Victims of cyberbullying may have silenced themselves due to feelings of depression, embarrassment, and helplessness, or a lack of knowledge about reporting incidences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

2.5 Demographic Factors Associated with Cyberbullying

Understanding the demographic factors associated with cyberbullying is essential to identifying vulnerable groups and designing effective interventions. Previous research has indicated that demographic characteristics can influence both the likelihood of experiencing and perpetrating cyberbullying. This section explores how various demographic factors, including gender, age, academic year, ethnicity, household income, religion, academic performance, and school affiliation, relate to cyberbullying experiences.

2.5.1 Gender

In terms of gender, a study from Akbulut & Eristi (2011) indicated that it was more common for male to be both cyberbullies and cybervictims. According to Bani Melhem (2022), the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in cyberbullying due to gender in favor of males. Lee et al. (2023) also with the same result of males having higher tendency in experience of cyberbullying. According to Tokunaga (2010), female might be more vulnerable in online settings where physical bullying isn't feasible. Women are more likely to engage in bullying that uses psychological strategies than men, who typically utilize physical threats. Studies on victims of cyberbullying, however, have not always revealed a definite gender difference (Tokunaga, 2010).

2.5.2 Age

According to Tokunaga (2010), cyberbullying can occur from elementary school through university and is not age-specific. Conceptually linked to cyberbullying, flaming is the use of harsh or abusive words toward adults and children online. The vast majority of the research focuses on children and teens, even though cyberbullying occurs in all age groups to varied degrees. It is typical in the research to investigate if age is a significant indicator of being a victim of cyberbullying. Important information on the grade level where cyberbullying most commonly occurs can be gained from the research of the relationship between victimization and age. Making the relationship clearer can help identify areas where resources for preventing cyberbullying within educational institutions can be directed to gain the best results (Tokunaga, 2010). A study from Mohd Fauzi et al., (2024) state that there was an association between age and experience of being cyberbullied among IPTA students in East Coast region which was 54.4%. Another research from Maeve Duggan (2017) also state that 41% of American adults experienced online harassment after conducting a survey.

2.5.3 Academic year

The frequency of cyberbullying may also be influenced by the school year. According to studies from N. Darawsheh (2023), because they are still getting used to university life, first-year students are frequently more susceptible to cyberbullying. They may be targets of cyberbullying because they are less accustomed to the school setting, have fewer established social networks, and may feel compelled to fit in. Senior students, on the other hand, might be less vulnerable to these dangers because of their more mature and established social networks.

2.5.4 Ethnicity

One demographic element that can have a big impact on cyberbullying encounters is ethnicity. Minority groups may be more likely to be singled out because of their race, language, or cultural heritage (Xu et al., 2019). Racial insults and cultural prejudice are two examples of the particular types of internet harassment that ethnic minorities frequently experience (Weinstein et al., 2021). Students from minority ethnic groups (such as Chinese or Indian) may experience cyberbullying behaviours rooted in ethnic stereotypes in a multicultural setting like Malaysia (Khairul & Mohideen, 2016).

2.5.5 Household income

A student's experiences with cyberbullying may be influenced by their socioeconomic standing, which is frequently determined by familial income. Because they lack the resources to properly handle or report such instances, Nagata et al. (2022) indicates that students from lower household income may be more vulnerable to cyberbullying. On the other hand, students from wealthier families might have greater access to tools, such as technology and support networks, to shield themselves from online harassment (Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023).

2.5.6 Religion

The likelihood of encountering cyberbullying can be influenced by one's religious connection, particularly if the bullying is motivated by one's religious identity or values. According to research by Erliyani (2021), cyberbullying is more common among religious minorities since they are occasionally singled out for harassment because of their customs, beliefs, or clothing. Students from less prevalent religious groups (such as Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian) may encounter particular difficulties in coping with instances of cyberbullying pertaining to their faith in Malaysia, a country with a diverse religious population.

2.5.7   Academic performance

Academic difficulties are frequently reported by victims of cyberbullying as a result of their obsession with the cyberbullying experience. Aparisi et al. (2021) asserts that academic performance is a construct that can have both quantitative and qualitative values, making it closely related to the evidence and dimension of the skills, information, attitudes, and values that students acquire over the teaching-learning process. The average of a student's grades within a specific school session serves as the main criteria for assessing academic performance (Aparisi et al., 2021). According to the research review, there is no clear correlation between cyberbullying and academic performance. Cyberbullying has been found to have a negative correlation with academic achievement in the majority of research (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2020; Wright, 2018). However, some studies have found no significant correlation and that traditional social bullying has a bigger effect on academic performance (Torres et al., 2019). As a result, the study conducted by Martínez-Martínez et al. (2020) with 3451 Spanish students between the ages of 12 and 19 came to the conclusion that youths with lower emotional intelligence were more likely to be cyberbullied and would face poor academic performance as a result. In a similar vein, Wright (2018) discovered that 413 American students between the ages of 17 and 19 who had experienced cyberbullying had worse academic performance and more academic challenges, though this effect was mitigated by perceived parental social support. Consequently, this relationship should be examined in order to shed light on the necessity of developing academic measures with students who are involved in cyberbullying cases (Aparisi et al., 2021).

2.5.8   School or program of study

The danger and type of cyberbullying experiences may be influenced by a student's school affiliation, or the particular academic program or department to which

they belong. Different academic expectations, social settings, and online interactions may influence how students from different schools (such as Health Sciences, Medicine, or Dentistry) interact with their peers. Students in high-stress or competitive programs, for example, may experience many dynamics, such as group tensions or competition, which can lead to online harassment (Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023). Additionally, tight social circles where rumour or exclusion can happen more readily may put student in smaller, more intimate programs at risk for bullying. Developing focused solutions that cater to the particular requirements of every academic community can be made easier with an understanding of how school association affects cyberbullying.

2.6   Mental Health Impact of Cyberbullying

The mental health effects of cyberbullying are significant and often long-lasting. Victims of cyberbullying may experience a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and stress. A study of Malaysian undergraduate medical students found that 23.8%, 51.6%, and 15.9% exhibited depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms at the start of the semester (Lee et al., 2023; Hajira Ramlan et al., 2020). Kowalski et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that individuals exposed to cyberbullying had higher rates of mental health distress compared to those not exposed. The anonymity and relentless nature of online bullying make it particularly damaging, often leading to feelings of helplessness, isolation, and severe mental health conditions (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). According to Alghamdi et al. (2024), numerous college students were discovered to have experienced cyberbullying, and there was a substantial association between cyberbullying and stress, anxiety, and depression, suggesting that cyberbullying may have an effect on students' mental health.

Additionally, studies from Faryadi (2011) have demonstrated that cyberbullying harms the mental and physical well-being of helpless victims. Cyberbullying victims experience severe mental stress that makes it difficult for them to focus on their academics, which negatively impacts their academic performance. Cyberbullying has a depressing effect that keeps students from achieving academic success since the victims are frequently psychologically harmed (Faryadi, 2011). A survey conducted by a Malaysian institution with 365 first-year students found that 85% of the participants said that cyberbullying had an impact on their grades and overall academic performance (Faryadi, 2011). Additionally, 85% of respondents concurred that bullying had a terrible effect on their emotions and created unthinkable psychological issues for the victims.

2.7   Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

General Strain Theory (GST), proposed by Agnew (1992), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms behind behaviors such as cyberbullying. GST posits that individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve their goals, face the removal of positively valued stimuli, or encounter negative stimuli. This strain can lead to negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and depression, which may drive individuals to engage in delinquent behaviors as a coping mechanism (Agnew, 1992). In the context of cyberbullying, research indicates that increased levels of strain are associated with higher engagement in cyberbullying behaviors among college students (Kail, 2016). Also, in the context of cybervictimization, expatriate students often face unique strains such as cultural alienation, homesickness, and social isolation, which can create feelings of helplessness and insecurity (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023). When subjected to cyberbullying, these individuals may experience negative emotions like anger, frustration, anxiety, or

depression, which are significant outcomes of the strain caused by victimization (Agnew, 1992). Thus, GST suggests a cycle where the experience of being victimized can perpetuate further delinquency, as individuals seek ways to alleviate their emotional pain. In the case of expatriate students in Qatar, the theory underscores how the distinct strains faced in a foreign environment can heighten the likelihood of experiencing cyberbullying and the subsequent negative emotional and behavioral responses (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023). The relationship between cybervictimization and strain is particularly relevant, as General Strain Theory (GST) posits that individuals who experience negative stimuli, such as bullying or harassment, may react with negative emotions that can further exacerbate their mental health issues (Agnew, 1992).

Moreover, GST highlights the importance of perceived injustice and the magnitude of strain, suggesting that strains perceived as unfair are more likely to result in delinquent behavior (Agnew, 2001). This is particularly relevant in the university setting, where students may feel overwhelmed by academic demands or social expectations. In the study conducted by Kail (2016), it was found that while strain directly influenced cyberbullying behaviors, the measure of negative emotions did not show a significant effect, indicating that the relationship between strain and cyberbullying may be more complex than initially thought. This suggests that while strain can lead to cyberbullying, the emotional responses to that strain may not always manifest in the same way across different individuals. Thus, GST serves as a valuable lens through which to examine the mental health impacts of cyberbullying among university students, particularly in understanding how various demographic factors and mental health outcomes are interrelated (Kail, 2016).
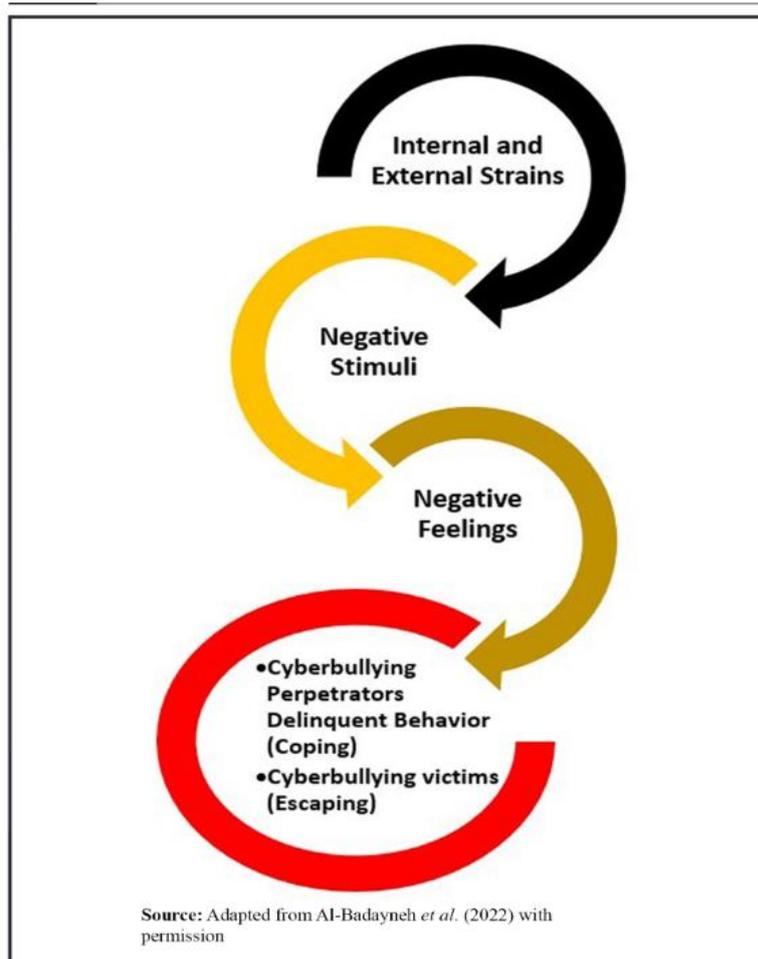
Internal and External Strains

Negative Stimuli

Negative Feelings

- Cyberbullying Perpetrators Delinquent Behavior (Coping)
- Cyberbullying victims (Escaping)

Source: Adapted from Al-Badayneh *et al.* (2022) with permission

Figure 2.1 Theoretical model of the General Strain Theory (GST) adopted from Al-Badayneh et al. (2023)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the complex relationship between various strains and the manifestation of cyberbullying behaviors among expatriate students. The theoretical framework posited in the figure suggests that both internal and external stressors encountered in host countries generate adverse stimuli, leading to negative emotional responses such as anger, anxiety, and depression (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023). External strains include experiences of stigmatization, social exclusion, and feelings of alienation, which significantly impact the psychological well-being of expatriate students. These negative emotional states can propel students toward engaging in delinquent behavior, either by becoming perpetrators of cyberbullying or by falling

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victim to it as a coping mechanism (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023). Moreover, the figure highlights the severe psychological challenges associated with cyberbullying, including thoughts of suicide, despondency, social anxiety, and humiliation, which can further exacerbate the students' emotional distress and negatively affect their academic performance (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023). By mapping these relationships, Figure 2.1 underscores the intricate interplay between strains, emotional responses, and cyberbullying behaviors, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to support the mental health of expatriate students in educational settings.
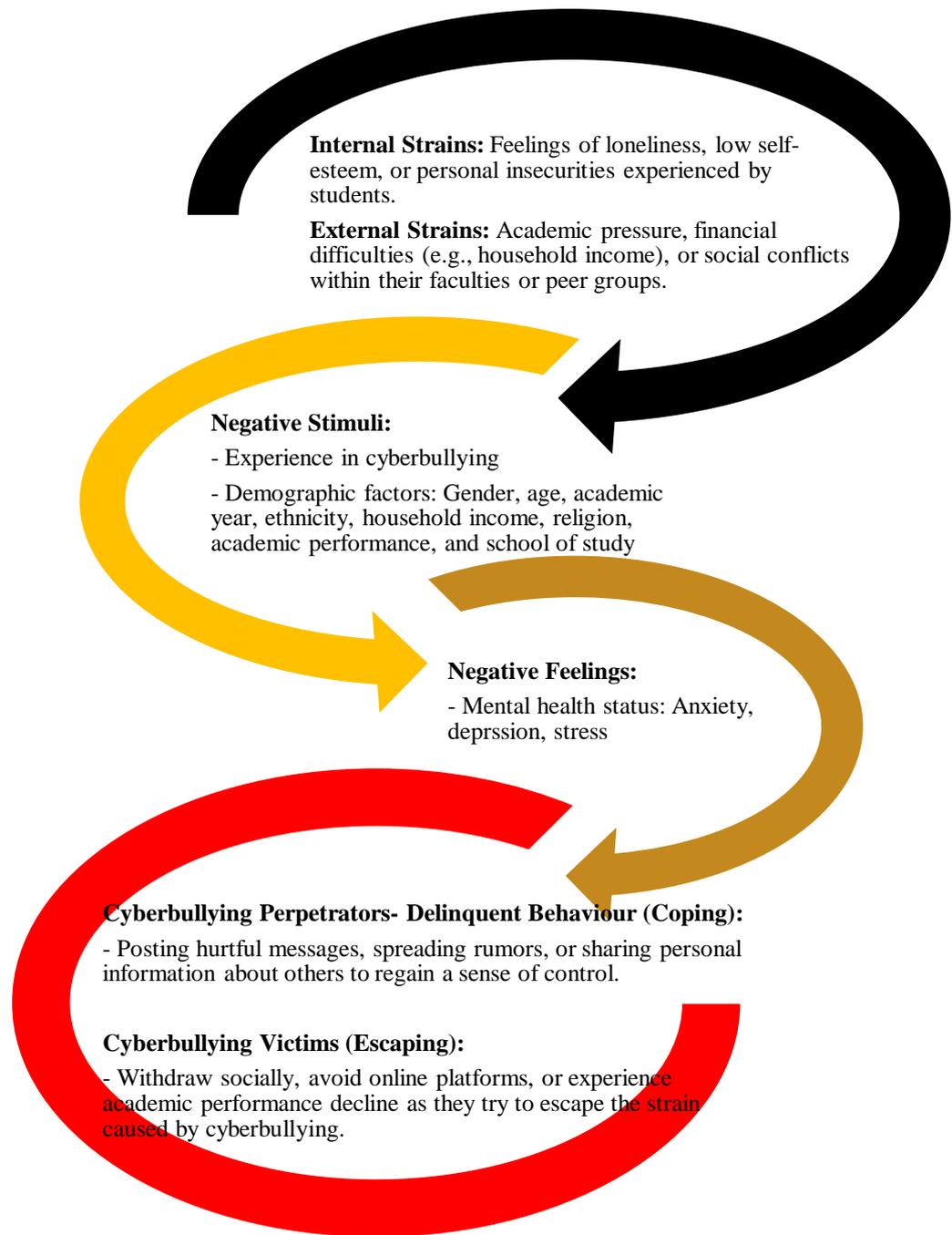
Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework adapted from GST model from Al-Badayneh et al. (2023)

In the context of university students, particularly in a health campus setting where academic and social pressures are prevalent, students may encounter unique strains that make them susceptible to cyberbullying. According to GST by Anew (1992), the widespread nature of cyberbullying can be viewed as a significant source of