

**CYBERBULLYING ON FACEBOOK:
AN EXPLORATORY PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY ON LIVED EXPERIENCES
AMONG THE YOUNG ADULT VICTIMS IN
BANGLADESH**

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BANGLADESH**

by

AFTAB HOSSAIN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DCSF	Department for Children, Schools, and Families
DSA	Digital Security Act 2018
FB	Facebook
RQ	Research Question
SM	Social Media
SNS	Social Networking Sites CB Cyberbullying

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BULI SIBER DI FACEBOOK: SATU KAJIAN TINJAUAN FENEMOLOGI MENGENAI PENGALAMAN YANG DITANGGUNG OLEH MANGSA DEWASA AWAL DI BANGLADESH

ABSTRAK

Dalam era digital, buli siber telah menjadi keprihatinan utama, terutamanya dalam kalangan Dewasa muda. Walau bagaimanapun, memahami selok-belok fenomena ini dalam konteks keunikan sosiobudaya Bangladesh masih mempunyai jurang dalam penyelidikan. Disertasi ini menjalankan eksplorasi menyeluruh tentang penganiayaan buli siber dalam kalangan Dewasa muda di Bangladesh, dengan memberikan tumpuan khusus terhadap pengalaman mereka di platform Facebook. Berteraskan Teori Ekologi Sosial Bronfenbrenner, kajian ini mengambil pendekatan tinjauan fenomenologi. 16 orang dewasa muda yang tinggal di Dhaka, sebuah bandar yang dikenali dengan bilangan pengguna Facebook yang besar, telah menyertai temu bual separa berstruktur. Menggunakan kaedah persampelan homogen yang berdasarkan tujuan, penyelidikan ini memastikan kepelbagaian dalam kalangan peserta sambil melindungi identiti mereka. Analisis tematik transkrip-transkrip temu bual, yang difasilitasi oleh perisian analisis kualitatif NVivo, mendedahkan lima tema utama yang menerangkan kerumitan penganiayaan buli siber dalam konteks Bangladesh. Tema-tema ini merangkumi motivasi di sebalik insiden-insiden buli siber di Facebook, peranan yang mempengaruhi persekitaran sosial para mangsa, tindak balas persekitaran sosial mereka terhadap penganiayaan, strategi mengatasi yang digunakan oleh para mangsa, dan sokongan yang diberikan oleh ekologi sosial mereka untuk mengatasi pengalaman-pengalaman yang menyedihkan ini. Berdasarkan Teori Ekologi Sosial Bronfenbrenner, kajian ini menekankan kepentingan memahami cara

mikrosistem (dinamik keluarga dan rakan sebaya), mesosistem (interaksi antara mikrosistem), exosistem (institusi-institusi dan struktur-struktur yang secara tidak langsung mempengaruhi para individu), dan makrosistem (norma budaya dan masyarakat) secara kolektif membentuk pengalaman-pengalaman golongan Dewasa muda yang menghadapi buli siber. Kesimpulannya, disertasi ini menyokong pembangunan dasar kebangsaan mengenai buli siber di Bangladesh, dengan mengambil kira nuansa sosiobudaya yang diperkatakan oleh teori Bronfenbrenner. Selain itu, kajian ini mengesyorkan pelaksanaan inisiatif pendidikan untuk meningkatkan kesedaran dalam kalangan Dewasa muda, selaras dengan penekanan teori sistem ekologi terhadap pelbagai lapisan pengaruh. Menangani kebimbangan ini secara menyeluruh, masyarakat dapat berusaha ke arah mengurangkan kesan buli siber dan memupuk persekitaran dalam talian yang lebih selamat untuk generasi mudanya.

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, cyberbullying has emerged as a pressing concern, particularly among young adults. However, understanding the intricacies of this phenomenon in the unique sociocultural context of Bangladesh has remained a gap in research. This dissertation conducts a comprehensive exploration of cyberbullying victimization among young adults in Bangladesh, with a particular emphasis on their experiences within the Facebook platform. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, this study adopts an exploratory phenomenological approach. Sixteen young adults residing in Dhaka, a city known for its substantial Facebook user base, participated in semi-structured interviews. Employing a homogenous purposive sampling method, this research ensures diversity among participants while safeguarding their identities. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, facilitated by NVivo qualitative analysis software, reveals five major themes that illuminate the complexities of cyberbullying victimization within the context of Bangladesh. These themes encompass the motivations behind cyberbullying incidents on Facebook, the influential role of the victims' immediate social environment, the responses of their social environment to victimization, the coping strategies employed by victims, and the support provided by their social ecology to overcome these distressing experiences. In the light of Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, this study underscores the significance of understanding how the microsystem (family and peer dynamics), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (institutions and

structures indirectly affecting individuals), and macrosystem (cultural and societal norms) collectively shape the experiences of young adults facing cyberbullying. Conclusively, this dissertation advocates for the development of a national policy on cyberbullying in Bangladesh, taking into account the sociocultural nuances informed by Bronfenbrenner's theory. Additionally, this study recommends the implementation of educational initiatives to raise awareness among young people, aligning with ecological systems theory's emphasis on multiple layers of influence. By comprehensively addressing these concerns, society can work towards mitigating the impact of cyberbullying and cultivating a safer online environment for its youth.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research topic, outlining the significance of the study and its key concepts. It begins by discussing the background and context of the research problem, including the prevalence of cyberbullying on social media platforms, particularly Facebook, among young adults in Bangladesh. The chapter proceeds to define key terms related to cyberbullying, phenomenology, and the demographic focus on young adults. Lastly, it highlights the aims, objectives, and scope of the study while providing a rationale for why this research is necessary.

1.2 Background

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and the increasing reliance on social media platforms have reshaped how people, particularly young adults, interact, communicate, and form relationships. Facebook, as one of the most dominant social networking platforms worldwide, has become an integral part of daily life for millions of individuals. In Bangladesh, Dhaka has emerged as the second-highest city globally in terms of Facebook usage, with over 22 million active Facebook users in the capital alone (We Are Social, 2019). This platform has significantly altered the social dynamics of the youth, offering avenues for connection, socialization, and identity expression. However, as social media has gained popularity, it has also given rise to various forms of online harassment, among which cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue.

The prevalence of cyberbullying, particularly on platforms like Facebook, has escalated in recent years. In Bangladesh, where Facebook remains the primary social

networking site with 96.1% active users (Stats, 2018), young adults, especially females are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon (Mojid, 2024). According to Fahmidah (2024), among the Bangladeshi young adults, name-calling, body shaming a numerous type of rumors on social media makes the young adults (especially females) vulnerable psychologically and leads them to depression. According to the report "Bangladesh Cyber Crime Trend 2023" by the Cybercrime Awareness Foundation (CAF), cyberbullying accounted for 52.21% of all reported online crimes in 2022 (The Business Standard, 2024).

According to UNICEF (2024), Cyberbullying refers to persistent, harmful behaviors intended to harm an individual through digital means, often using social networking sites, email, text messages, or other forms of online communication. It is characterized by the repetition of aggressive acts, anonymity, and a significant power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim (Smith et al., 2008). The anonymity and reach that platforms like Facebook provide make it easier for perpetrators to engage in harmful actions without immediate accountability, which exacerbates the emotional and psychological toll on victims.

Globally, the issue of cyberbullying has drawn significant attention due to its impact on the mental health of young people. According to The Children's Society (2018), young adults are among the most prolific users of social media, yet they are also disproportionately affected by online harassment. A staggering 84% of American adolescents have reported experiencing cyberbullying at least once (Zilles, 2016). This trend is mirrored in Bangladesh, where the rise of social media use has paralleled a surge in online harassment incidents. UNICEF Bangladesh (2019) reported a sharp increase in cases of cyberbullying, particularly among young women and adolescents.

Despite the growing prevalence of cyberbullying, there is limited awareness of the issue, both among the public and policymakers.

Cyberbullying in Bangladesh has particularly serious implications for the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of its victims. In Dhaka, where Facebook is central to the social interactions of many young adults, the repercussions of online harassment are particularly stark. The social landscape in Bangladesh, deeply rooted in conservative cultural norms and strong expectations regarding social honor and reputation, intensifies the negative effects of cyberbullying. The act of bullying, when it involves public humiliation, body shaming, or character defamation, can tarnish the victim's reputation, leading to social isolation and distress. This has been further compounded by a growing number of incidents where cyberbullying leads to severe emotional and mental health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and, tragically, suicide.

The vulnerability of young women in Bangladesh to cyberbullying is particularly pronounced. Media reports have highlighted several high-profile cases in which female celebrities and young girls have been targeted with online harassment, often linked to gender norms, societal expectations, and digital access. For example, a widely publicized case in Prothom Alo (2022) recounted the tragic story of a K-pop singer (unrevealed) who took her life due to relentless cyberbullying, an issue that resonated globally and sparked widespread conversations about the dangers of online harassment. In Bangladesh, similar cases have unfolded. In recent years, several cases were found where teens committed suicide due to harassment online (The Daily Star, 2018; Kanya, 2020; UNECEF, 2020), a stark reminder of how cyberbullying can escalate into life-threatening consequences, particularly in cultures where mental health discussions are stigmatized.

A deeper look into the lived experiences of victims reveals the extent to which cyberbullying disrupts their everyday lives. Take, for instance, the case of Sara (a pseudonym), a 20-year-old university student in Dhaka (The Financial Express, 2022). After a disagreement with a few peers over a trivial matter, her Facebook feed became flooded with hate messages, derogatory slurs, and threatening comments. The perpetrators, often people she knew in real life, hid behind anonymous profiles, making it impossible for her to confront them directly. For months, Sara grappled with feelings of anxiety and fear, unable to focus on her studies. She withdrew from social activities and felt increasingly isolated. Sara's story is not an isolated incident. It is reflective of the broader trend of cyberbullying that young adults in Bangladesh face, which has profound psychological effects, including social withdrawal, diminished academic performance, and emotional distress.

In Bangladesh, societal factors such as limited legal frameworks, lack of social support systems, and prevailing conservative attitudes toward mental health and online harassment make it particularly difficult for victims to seek help. Young adults, especially women, often feel compelled to remain silent about their experiences of cyberbullying, fearing further victimization, social backlash, or reputational harm (Hossain et al., 2022; Curtas, n.d.). The absence of clear, accessible mechanisms for reporting cyberbullying exacerbates this problem. As a result, victims often navigate these hostile online environments alone, without adequate support or recourse.

The digital landscape in Bangladesh, though rapidly growing, is not fully equipped to handle the complexities of cyberbullying (Islam, 2024). While there have been legal provisions such as the Cyber Security Act (CSA) 2023, these laws have often been criticized for their vague definitions and inconsistent enforcement. This has left many victims without clear paths for seeking justice. In addition, the lack of public

awareness and education regarding cyberbullying contributes to the social silence surrounding the issue. This gap in both legal protections and societal awareness highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions, including improved policies, better educational initiatives, and stronger legal enforcement to protect young people online.

Furthermore, the lack of research on the specific experiences of cyberbullying victims in Bangladesh has created a significant gap in the understanding of the issue (Hossain, 2022). Most studies on cyberbullying have focused on adolescents or employed quantitative methods, without delving deeply into the qualitative, lived experiences of young adults. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by focusing on how young adults in Bangladesh experience and cope with cyberbullying on Facebook, exploring the cultural, psychological, and social factors that shape their responses to online harassment.

The intersection of technology, cultural norms, and social status plays a crucial role in how cyberbullying unfolds in Bangladesh. Young adults, particularly millennials and Generation Z, have been quick to adopt and master digital platforms, yet they are simultaneously exposed to the risks associated with online harassment (Mahmud, et al., 2023). The public nature of interactions on Facebook, coupled with the ease of creating fake profiles or remaining anonymous, amplifies the potential for cyberbullying. Unlike more private communication platforms, the visibility of Facebook interactions exposes victims to a larger audience, making the humiliation more public and enduring.

Moreover, the shift to online communication presents new challenges in Bangladesh's socio-cultural context, which values face-to-face interactions. The

anonymity offered by digital spaces, coupled with the lack of physical presence, allows perpetrators to act in ways they may not in person. This disinhibition fosters an environment where aggressive, harmful behavior can flourish. The cultural value placed on honor and reputation in Bangladesh, particularly for women, means that the consequences of cyberbullying extend beyond emotional distress to include long-lasting social stigmas, tarnishing the victim's reputation in their community (*Cyberbullying: What to Do if Someone Is Harassing You Online*, n.d.).

This study, therefore, seeks to explore these dynamics in depth, aiming to understand how cultural norms, social status, and technological factors converge to influence the experiences of young adults who are victims of cyberbullying on Facebook. By doing so, it will provide insights into the unique challenges faced by cyberbullying victims in Bangladesh and contribute to the development of strategies to mitigate the harm caused by online harassment. Additionally, it will highlight the gaps in current legal protections and explore potential interventions to address this growing issue.

1.3 Cyberbullying and Social Networking System

Cyberbullying, a form of bullying, involves the use of electronic communication channels such as email, cell phone calls, text messages, instant messaging, images, social networking platforms, and personal web pages to inflict harm on individuals through repetitive hostile actions (Akbar et al., 2020; Alipan et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2019; Ortega et al., 2012). Essentially, any electronic interaction aimed at belittling, tormenting, or threatening another member of the digital network constitutes cyberbullying.

The term 'cyberbullying' originates from the term 'bullying,' denoting online bullying. Scholars have offered various definitions of bullying, but the most widely accepted one involves "aggressive or hostile behavior" toward others. Crucially, bullying is characterized by the intent of aggressive behavior, its repetitive nature, and a power imbalance favoring the aggressor (Younan, 2019), where the bully typically holds greater socio-economic power than the victim. Moreover, the bully consistently engages in insulting, threatening, and aggressive behavior.

While traditional bullying has been a long-standing issue within educational institutions (Bosworth et al., 1999; Lapidot-Lefler & Dolev-Cohen, 2015; Moon et al., 2011; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 1996), the emergence of cyberbullying has raised unique concerns in both academic and research circles.

Firstly, cyberbullying transcends the symbolic security barrier that once existed within the homes of young people, who now have unrestricted access to technology. This shift has enabled perpetrators to engage in abusive behavior without fear of repercussions (Kowalski & Limber, 2012), effectively bringing bullying from schools and public spaces into the domestic realm.

Secondly, victims of cyberbullying are less likely to report incidents than those of traditional bullying because they may face restrictions and online surveillance imposed by parents or caregivers (Elsaesser et al., 2017). Different parenting styles affect bullying behavior. Authoritarian parenting can lead to more cyberbullying, while authoritative parenting can help prevent it (Elsaesser et al., 2017).

Several studies have identified significant similarities between cyberbullying perpetrators and traditional bullies (Englander et al., 2017; Agatston et al., 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Olweus, 2012a, 2012b; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Smith,

2012; Tokunaga, 2010; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Both types of bullying can deeply hurt victims, usually happen because of lack of oversight, often start in schools, and usually involve people the victims already know. However, cyberbullying introduces distinct characteristics:

a) Rapidity and Extensiveness: Cyberbullying spreads rapidly to a broad audience, often including individuals unfamiliar to the victim. This extensive reach intensifies the emotional impact on the victim.

b) Anonymity: Cyberbullies can hide their identities behind fictitious personas, making identification and apprehension challenging and further increasing the victim's sense of isolation and vulnerability.

c) Permanent Digital Trace: Cyberbullying leaves a lasting digital trail, potentially retraumatizing victims by preserving and sharing harmful content.

d) Evidence for Legal Action: Cyberbullying messages can serve as evidence for legal action against bullies, reinforcing accountability.

e) Reputation Damage: Victims of cyberbullying may experience lasting harm to their online reputation, impacting their social, academic, and professional lives.

f) Ubiquity: Cyberbullying can occur anywhere with internet access, invading the victim's personal space.

g) Privacy Invasion: Cyberbullies exploit social media to invade victims' privacy by sharing personal information or photos without consent, leading to humiliation and damage to self-esteem.

h) Addictive Behavior: Some individuals become addicted to cyberbullying, deriving a sense of power and control and perpetuating abusive conduct.

Cyberbullying stands as a unique form of bullying that leverages electronic devices and digital platforms, inflicting complex and far-reaching harm on victims beyond the scope of traditional bullying (Helfrich et al., 2020).

Some researchers have considered cyberbullying a derivative of conventional bullying (Campbell et al., 2012). The deliberate infliction of harm upon others in cyberspace occurs regardless of labels, sometimes with severe consequences such as documented cyberbullying-related suicides.

Cybercrimes include various illegal activities targeting computers, devices, networks, or people. These crimes have increased as technology has advanced. Individuals, even as avatars in virtual worlds, commit many offenses analogous to physical-world crimes. However, the vastness of the internet and evolving technology pose continuous challenges in addressing cybercrimes, particularly cyberbullying (Langos, 2012).

The classification of cyberbullying as a crime is a topic of debate. Due to its wider audience and anonymity, cyberbullying, which is distinct by its online nature, causes more psychological harm. Consequently, victims often struggle to identify and contact perpetrators. Given the moral outrage surrounding cyberbullying, it qualifies as a criminal offense that should be addressed legally, especially concerning its detrimental effects on young people's psychological well-being.

Continued advancements in technology and internet accessibility have exposed young people to the evolving landscape of offensive cyberbullying. Perpetrators may

begin with seemingly innocuous acts, such as hacking accounts, but these actions can escalate into harmful behavior, leading to severe psychological harm for victims (Betts & Spenser, 2017). Fun-seeking can be a significant motivator for cyberbullying, as evidenced by the findings of N. Wong and McBride (2018). Fun-seeking, rather than normative values, is a strong predictor of cyberbullying perpetration.

Cyberbullying victimization not only affects the psychological health of young people but also their physical well-being. Research indicates that victims may experience somatic symptoms, including sleep disturbances, irritability, headaches, tension, exhaustion, fatigue, appetite changes, pain, skin issues, and even bedwetting (Albdour et al., 2019a; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Lftman et al., 2013). Moreover, Litwiller & Brausch (2013) link cyberbullying to risky behaviors among teenagers, such as drug use, abuse, sexual risk activities, and suicidal tendencies. Tragically, cases of suicide indirectly or explicitly linked to online harassment, termed 'cyberbullicide,' have gained attention and are on the rise (COOK, 2020; Cyberbullying Research Centre, 2020).

Cyberbullying's reach transcends geographic borders, impacting individuals worldwide. Internet connectivity has bridged the gap between developed and developing nations, with countries like Bangladesh experiencing rapid digital infrastructure development (Matin et al., 2018). However, despite increased access to the internet, the digital divide persists, with disparities in computer literacy and access to technology among young people, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the sociocultural landscape is evolving, leading to harassment and banter on sensitive social issues such as culture, religion, sexual orientation, and educational backgrounds (Rahman et al., 2017).

In Bangladesh, cyberbullying is pervasive, yet few cases are reported due to various reasons. Women are particularly vulnerable online, with only a small percentage reporting their experiences to authorities (Akter, 2018). Even with laws in place, there are still problems. Victims don't have specific ways to report issues, policies aren't working well, it's hard to gather evidence, and many parents, teachers, and schools don't understand cyberbullying (Sarker & Shahid, 2018; UNICEF, 2019).

At the end, we can say that this section provides a comprehensive overview of cyberbullying, its characteristics, its impact on victims, and its prevalence in global contexts. The discussion underscores the need for legal and educational interventions to address this pressing issue effectively.

In our exploration of the subject matter, it's essential to establish a foundational understanding of key concepts that underpin this study. These concepts encompass cyberbullying, Facebook, phenomenology, lived experience, and the demographic focus on young adults.

1.3.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying represents a prevalent and pervasive issue in the digital age. It is characterized by bullying, insulting, or aggressive behavior carried out online, often involving the repetitive targeting of victims. The tools of this misconduct encompass various information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the internet. This form of victimization is distinct in that it can be executed anonymously and often leaves victims feeling vulnerable and untouchable (Hinduja & Patchin, 2016). Furthermore, research (López-Meneses et al., 2020) has hinted at a potential

correlation between cyberbullying and factors such as socioeconomic status and ICT literacy, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

1.4 Definition and conditions of Bullying

Scholars worldwide have agreed upon a variety of definitions of bullying. Western world researchers have identified bullying and established a consensus to define it (Bauman et al., 2013).

In the field of bullying research, two definitions stand out for their influence. Dan Olweus, a pioneer in the study of bullying, defined it in 1993 as a situation where an individual is repeatedly exposed to negative actions from one or more persons and finds it difficult to defend themselves. In 2008, Smith et al. offered a slightly different take, emphasizing bullying as "an aggressive act or behavior" carried out repeatedly over time against a victim who couldn't easily defend themselves. While both definitions highlight the elements of repetition and the victim's difficulty in self-defense, Olweus focuses on "negative actions," whereas Smith et al. use the term "aggressive acts or behaviors."

The difference between the two definitions is the words that define the psychological situation where bullying is occurring. The first definition refers to the words 'negative actions,' while the latter stresses more on 'aggressive act or behavior.' Olweus (1993) clarified the difference by defining the meaning of negative actions. Here, he deliberately explained the subtext of these wordings by explaining the aggressive behavior and infliction. The word 'aggression' has been accepted as a negative action or conduct (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Slonje and Smith, 2008). In summary, we can understand that

Physical aggression refers to overt actions aimed at causing bodily harm to the victim. This can include hitting, kicking, pushing, or punching: The act of repeatedly targeting someone physically in a way that causes pain or injury falls under this category. Damaging or stealing property: Deliberately breaking or taking a victim's belongings to cause distress.

Verbal aggression involves the use of words to belittle, humiliate, or intimidate the victim. These behaviors often have lasting emotional effects. Examples include: Name-calling, insults, or mocking: Constantly calling someone derogatory names based on their appearance, background, or personality.

The perpetrator repeatedly threatens to harm the victim or their loved ones, thereby instilling fear and anxiety. This is akin to a situation where a group of students persistently make fun of a classmate's attire or physical appearance, thereby undermining their self-esteem.

Relational or social aggression is another form of bullying that is more indirect and involves manipulating social relationships to harm the victim. It is particularly common in peer groups where social standing is important. For example: Deliberately excluding someone from social groups, activities, or conversations results in their isolation. Creating or spreading false information about someone aims to damage their reputation and social relationships. In addition to defining negative actions and aggressive behavior, it is crucial to reinforce the importance of repetition and power imbalance in the bullying dynamic.

Globally renowned researchers (Olweus, 1999; Smith et al., 2008; Wingate et al., 2013) accept bullying when negative behavior consists of three basic components:

Intention: Intention means that the bully is purposefully trying to cause harm to the victim, whether that harm is physical or emotional.

Repetition: This refers to the ongoing nature of the bullying. It's not a one-time event; rather, it's a pattern of behavior that happens over a period of time.

Imbalance of power: Power imbalance is a core characteristic of bullying and cyberbullying, distinguishing it from other forms of conflict. In traditional bullying, power typically stems from physical strength, social status, or authority. In cyberbullying, however, power imbalances are more complex and influenced by a variety of digital factors. These imbalances are often more fluid and multifaceted, influenced by anonymity, technological literacy, and the digital architecture itself.

The term fluid refers to the fact that in the digital realm, power is not fixed or based solely on physical strength or social standing, as in traditional bullying. Instead, power can shift based on digital literacy, anonymity, and the ability to manipulate online tools. For example, an individual who might not hold social power in face-to-face interactions may gain significant power online through anonymity or technical skills. This flexibility allows cyberbullies to exploit different forms of digital influence, making the power imbalance more adaptable and dynamic compared to offline settings.

The digital architecture of social media platforms, messaging apps, and other online tools can inherently create or reinforce power imbalances. The design of these platforms allows cyberbullies to exploit features like anonymity, rapid communication, and the potential for content to go viral, all of which can magnify the impact of cyberbullying.

The consequences of such fluid and digitally enabled power imbalances can be more devastating than in traditional bullying. Victims may feel helpless, as the anonymity of the bully makes it difficult to fight back, and the viral nature of content makes the bullying experience more public and enduring. Moreover, a lack of direct physical interaction in cyberbullying can strip away the emotional cues that might restrain face-to-face bullying, leading to more extreme behaviors online.

For certain situations, intent to injure may be straightforward to define, such as constantly hitting someone to allow them to experience physical discomfort. Therefore, motive can be difficult to prove. The abuser may assert that they did not inflict any harm upon their victim. Alternatively, the victim could not be hurt, given the bully's attempt to inflict injury, or even claim they have been bullied.

A repeated act defines a behavioral activity. Bullying is not just a single-time activity. It is a continuous activity by the bully toward the victim in a certain period (Smith et al., 2013). In bullying contexts, the presence of repetition distinguishes every case from those that are systemic. Repetition can be easily defined in certain cases, such as the number of hits or kicks and blows that a person takes or the number of times that someone is called an unpleasant word, as both can be counted.

There is, however, a lack of clarification in the literature as to whether repetition occurs in one person's actions or whether several people behave only once. This makes it difficult to describe bullying as exaggerated, assess it, and determine if it happened. It was agreed by the DCSF in 2009 that there were a number of situations in which the requirement for consistency could be met so long as there was an attempt to hurt and an imbalance of power. Sexual, racial, discriminatory, or homophobic circumstances, as well as the presence of disabilities, are associated with these

incidents. Because these types of abuse seem so bad, these repetition exceptions are important, but the DCSF did not explain why. As this study progresses, more information about bullying abuse becomes available.

In bullying, one entity abuses his/her power over another where the person with less power is in the victim position. Thus, an imbalance of power and control creates a relationship between the bully and the victim. A power imbalance shows that perpetrators have a stronger group position and prefer victims who possess less physical or social strength to reduce the impact of their behaviors (Nelson et al., 2019; Olweus, 1993). For instance, bullies minimize the loss of affection by selecting victims who are unlikely to receive defense from significant others. This power could be either physical, social, physiological, or any combination of these, as well as other forms of power or control (Olweus, 1993).

In this case of power imbalance, the victim finds it difficult and crucial to defend themselves during the continuous process. If both parties are strong and equal, that is not bullying (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). However, there are not enough explanations found in the previous studies of the scholarly world. In addition, their claim is that when it happens between friends, then both parties claim it as a joke. In this situation, it is not bullying anymore (Rawlings, 2019). However, the researchers are yet to identify in this type of situation whether it is bullying or not. Even so, there is a gap in the literature review as well. This knowledge gap has led to discrepancies in the justification of bullying from the perspectives of both the bully and the victim. Nevertheless, as the definition of bully has changed over time, the common thing in every definition is that both parties know each other.

In addition to the bullying literature, bullying is not only limited to children and adolescents. Bullying is also prevalent among adults. Bullying, not only in the workplace but also in higher education, is widespread (Hutchison & Kroese, 2015). Samnani and Singh (2012) have provided an explanation of the prevalence of bullying in both the workplace and among adults.

In 'Downward Bullying' (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015), the authors have argued, applying the theoretical perspective of power imbalance, that imbalance connected to formal power can explain downward bullying where an employer bullies a worker. From this viewpoint, managers have legitimate control resulting from the organization's formal power structure, and downward bullying can be seen as a manager's misuse of this power.

When a co-worker or a person from a similar working position bullies another, it is known as 'horizontal bullying.' In this type of bullying, the position of a worker might be in a power position due to seniority or time spent in that position. The power imbalance can occur not only in an upward direction but also in a collective downward-to-upward direction. For instance, we could identify 'upward bullying' if all the juniors or subordinates form a group against the seniors or managers. There is another type of bullying mentioned by De Cieri et al. (2019). It is known as 'inward bullying.' When a person establishes relationships with others and their surroundings begin to bully them, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as "inward bullying." For example. If a student makes friends with another student at the university, and later the high school or local friends of that newly made friend start to bully, then it is called inward bullying.

Sources of power in young people's relationships are often vague, making it difficult to define power imbalance (Green et al., 2017). California Bullying Victimization Scale (Felix et al., 2011), Ask bullying victims to align themselves on various measures (e.g., physical size, popularity) with their primary aggressor(s), which helps define different types of power. However, measures do not specifically advocate for bullying targets if they are able to protect themselves, as this is the core element of the power imbalance defined in the definitions of bullying. Perceptions of the power dynamics of bullying among young people can have long-term consequences for their relationship growth and the academic institution's well-being.

1.5 Definition and conditions of Cyberbullying

Defining cyberbullying is partially dependent on bullying in many cases. Because the term cyberbullying is directly connected to the original concept of bullying. According to Smith et al. (2008, p. 376), cyberbullying shares many similarities with traditional bullying, such as the bully's use of singular or plural forms, persistent aggressive behavior, and the victim's inability to defend themselves through electronic means.

The concept of cyberbullying has been widely discussed and defined by numerous researchers and authors (Cretu & Morandau, 2024; Fauzi, 2024). While there are subtle differences in how experts describe this phenomenon, several common elements are often present across various academic and scholarly definitions. These definitions often emphasize the role of digital platforms in facilitating the bullying, the repetitive nature of the harmful behavior, and the power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim (Zhang et al., 2022; Chun, 2020). According to Iqbal & Jami (2022), the shared themes in these definitions reflect the collective understanding of

what constitutes cyberbullying in the current digital age. We discuss some of the definitions below.

- 1) Aggressive Behavior,
- 2) Repetition of the act,
- 3) Power imbalance between parties,
- 4) Usage of ICT tools was the four components found in cyberbullying acts.

"Online harassment" that includes threats or other harmful behavior directed at a young person using technology to humiliate someone. One can either send this behavior directly to the youth or post it publicly online for others to see. Here, the primary concern is the aggressive behavior and the use of ICT tools. In 2006, Patchin and Hinduja identified the intention to harm, not the aggressive behavior itself. On the contrary, Nagata et al. (2022) defined cyberbullying as there being no relation with gender, sexual orientation, race, and socioeconomic class. A person from an inferior or similar socioeconomic class can bully online, as he thought. Nevertheless, there should be the presence of aggressive online behavior, usage of technology, and repetition of the act.

Scholars differ on what constitutes cyberbullying. Some focus on one-time acts of online aggression by individuals from a superior socioeconomic class toward those from an inferior class, arguing that repetition isn't essential for the act to be considered bullying (Bauman et al., 2012; Englander, 2023). Others contend that repetitive aggressive behavior is a key component of cyberbullying (Belsey, 2017; Kowalski et al., 2014; Olweus, 2012; Sultan et al., 2023; Alipan et al., 2020).

These latter scholars identify four basic elements that define cyberbullying: aggressive online behavior, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools, the repetition of bullying actions, and an imbalance of power between the parties involved. Numerous researchers have put forth various definitions of cyberbullying based on these elements (Çakar-Mengü, 2023; Casas et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020; Tokunaga, 2010).

The different perspectives illustrate that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of cyberbullying, but key components like aggression, technology use, repetition, and power imbalance are often considered. We will briefly discuss the four basic components of cyberbullying below.

1.5.1 Aggression on behavior (Aggressive behavior)

When we explain cyberbullying, we find that the bully's aggressive behavior is common. This element of behavior is common in almost every bully, online and offline. Whether it is online or traditional bullying, aggressive behavior is one of the key elements of bullying. This aggressive behavior also refers to insulting, abusive, offensive, rude, and similar types of behavior toward the victim.

Aggression is any conduct that is intended to damage or harm another person (Emanuels, 2022; Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Proactive aggression refers to negative actions intended to obtain an advantage or accomplish a desired purpose at the expense of another person, harming another person, while reactive aggression is an angry response to frustration or provocation. Since cyberbullying is a subtype of general aggression, higher reactive aggression should be correlated with it, but especially with higher proactive aggression. Graf (2022) found a correlation between

reporting cyberbullies and cyberbully victims and higher levels of proactive and reactive aggression. It can be concluded, based on previous results, that the perpetration of cyberbullying goes along with greater reactive aggression, but particularly with greater proactive aggression (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). Victims and even those defending them might show more reactive aggression. This could mean they use aggression to handle their anger or as a quick way to defend themselves.

Santre (2023) argues that aspects of violence, aggressive behavior, and harmful actions should be considered essential components of cyberbullying, which can occur through various electronic devices. In the digital landscape, offensive content targeting an individual can be posted in multiple formats, such as comments, images, or videos. Once posted, these materials can be accessed, saved, commented on, or 'liked' by others, creating a cycle of repeated harm for the victim, who is forced to relive the experience.

Furthermore, the mechanisms for aggression in cyberspace can differ from those in traditional, face-to-face settings. In traditional bullying, aggressive behavior often takes the form of verbal insults or physical abuse. In contrast, cyberbullying can occur without direct communication with the victim; an insulting or aggressive message sent within the victim's social circle can be psychologically damaging. Even the anticipation of future insults can have a devastating impact on the victim (January Febro et al., 2024).

The language and sentence structure in this summary aim for clarity and coherence while capturing the nuances of the research on cyberbullying.

1.5.2 Repetition of the act

In the academic literature, cyberbullying is often defined as a repetitive act, signifying that the aggressive behavior towards the victim is a continuous activity. The intent to cause harm is consistent and ongoing (Newman, 2020). For instance, a video posted online by a cyberbully can be viewed, shared, edited, and republished by many others, amplifying the harm to the victim each time it is shared (Yosep, 2023). Stone et al. (2013, p.245) refer to this amplification process as 'snowballing.' In such cases, the initial bully sets off a chain of events, but the content continues to humiliate the victim each time it is disseminated further.

Another issue that arises is the measurement and definition of 'repetition' in cyberbullying. There is still no consensus among researchers, policymakers, and academics regarding how to measure the repetitiveness and severity of the attacking language and behavior. In some instances, a single act of cyberbullying, even if not repeated, can have serious ramifications (Iqbal & Jami, 2022). For example, a life-threatening message from an anonymous source may not be repetitive, but it could significantly disrupt daily life, instilling undue caution and causing severe stress and anxiety.

1.5.3 Power Imbalance between parties (perpetrator and the victim)

In the digital sphere, individuals who possess greater internet acumen, sophisticated online access, and a robust internet connection conspicuously wield more power. Researchers like Macaulay et al. (2022) and Knack et al. (2021) explain that this power is strengthened by abilities such as being anonymous and feeling safe while online. Research by Jattamart & Kwangsawad (2021) and Yeşilyurt & Vezne (2023)

shows that being more skilled at using the internet is linked to a higher likelihood of involvement in cyberbullying. However, this connection may not apply to all types of online harassment, like texting or making threats.

Technical skills like the creation of counterfeit profiles, compromising digital security protocols, and unauthorized access to social media and email accounts are indicative of advanced internet literacy. This expertise amplifies the power dynamic by enabling the perpetrator to remain anonymous, rendering them essentially impervious to identification by the victim. The literature suggests that in cyberbullying scenarios, anonymity possesses an analogous empowering effect to physical strength in traditional bullying contexts (Yeşilyurt & Vezne, 2023). This unequal distribution of power manifests not only as a psychological burden but also as a legal disadvantage for the victim.

The literature suggests that the power dynamics in cyberbullying are not rigid but rather fluid and contingent upon various variables, including but not limited to physical, psychological, and social characteristics. Virtual environments inherently modify traditional power structures, offering features like anonymity and unlimited accessibility that serve to empower perpetrators while disempowering victims (Peter & Petermann, 2018; Olweus & Limber, 2018).

The dearth of academic consensus on the precise variables that contribute to these shifting power dynamics in cyberbullying remains a subject of ongoing debate (Olweus & Limber, 2018; Doxbeck & Noel, 2023). The narrative research on cyberbullying victimization and negative outcomes in graduate education left me feeling truly powerless. Emerging research indicates that conventional markers of power, such as physical strength or social status, are less pertinent in the digital realm.

However, the ability to remain anonymous or even assume a different identity provides a new axis along which power is measured (Dennehy et al., 2020; Olweus & Limber, 2018).

The habitual engagement with digital technologies, particularly among younger populations, inherently cultivates asymmetrical power relations. According to Figà-Talamanca (2024), the architecture of these digital environments itself can engender power imbalances, irrespective of individual intent. Young people often hesitate to ask for help from adults they think aren't good with technology. This makes it easier for wrongdoers to get away with their actions (Vaillancourt et al., 2017).

Traditional markers of power imbalance in bullying, such as physical dominance or social standing, are not directly translatable to the domain of cyberbullying. Nevertheless, anonymity constitutes a unique form of power in the digital sphere; it allows the perpetrator an advantage of concealed identity, thus deepening the power asymmetry. In short, the various factors involved change how we see power imbalances in cyberbullying, highlighting the need for a careful approach in future research.

1.5.4 Usage of ICT Tools

The scholarly community broadly concurs with the distinctive features that set cyberbullying apart from its traditional counterpart. According to West (2015), these defining characteristics include anonymity, disinhibition, power imbalance, and the role of bystanders.

The affordances of digital technology offer perpetrators the advantage of anonymity, effectively complicating identification and culpability (Kaarakainen & Hutri, 2016).