



## Impact of Cyberbullying on Psychological Well-Being of Adolescents

Ifrah Nisar<sup>1</sup>, Tayyeba Bibi<sup>2</sup> & Irfanullah Khitab Momand<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bachelor Graduate, Department of Psychology Comsats University Islamabad, Pakistan,

Email: [ifrahnisarahmed518@gmail.com](mailto:ifrahnisarahmed518@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>MPhil Scholar, Department of Psychology Hazara University Mansehra, Email: [Tayyebabibi68@gmail.com](mailto:Tayyebabibi68@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>MPhil Scholar, Department of Psychology, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan,

Email: [irfanullahkhitab.afg@gmail.com](mailto:irfanullahkhitab.afg@gmail.com)

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#### Corresponding Author:

Ifrah Nisar

Email:

[ifrahnisarahmed518@gmail.com](mailto:ifrahnisarahmed518@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is now a burning issue that is impacting the psychological health of adolescents, especially in the areas where social media is quickly being used. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of cyberbullying on emotional, social and academic functioning of teenagers in the Mansehra and Abbottabad districts. The qualitative research method was used with semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Purposive sampling was used to pick 30 respondents who were then analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke. The analysis revealed four key themes, namely emotional distress and anxiety, low self-esteem and social withdrawal, academic stress and concentration problems, and the role of family and school support. The results indicated that cyberbullying results to increased anxiety, constant fear, and insomnia, as well as destruction of self-confidence and promotion of social isolation. Distraction and stress interfere with academic performance and contribute to the worsening of psychological strain. Notably, family and school support have been referred to as protective variables that allow teens to overcome cyberbullying and resilience. The study highlights the importance of specific awareness campaigns, prevention, and supportive interventions to help reduce the negative consequences of cyberbullying and support the healthy psychological growth of the adolescent population.

## Introduction

The booming growth of digital technology and social media has changed the communication patterns in terms of adolescents, socialization, and expression. Although these technologies have many positive educational and social effects, they have also spawned the concept of new aggression, cyberbullying being one of the most alarming developments (Alahmad, 2025).

Cyberbullying is the deliberate and recurring harm caused via electronics like the social network site, messaging application, online games and emails. Cyberbullying is more ubiquitous and harder to avoid as opposed to traditional bullying because it may happen anywhere and anytime, and it is often anonymous, which can be very hard to evade. Since adolescents are one of the biggest users of digital media, they are also susceptible to cyberbullying (Bali et al., 2023).

Adolescence is a highly sensitive development period which is marked with emotional sensitivity, identity formation and an increased desire to be accepted by the society. Negative peer interaction during this age may have a significant influence on the psychological well-being. Cyber bullying subjects' adolescents to constant harassment, humiliation, social ostracism, and threats which can have serious negative emotional destabilizing effects. The fact that online platforms are always connected implies that the spread of harmful information can be fast and persistent, which leads to the further aggravation of negative emotions and powerlessness in victims. Cyberbullying has therefore become a major societal health issue that has been affecting teenagers of various cultures and socio-economic statuses (Cakar & Mengü, 2023).

Studies have always indicated a close interrelationship between cyberbullying and poor psychological outcomes among adolescents. Victims of cyberbullying also tend to develop numerous anxieties, depression and stress as well as self-esteem (Casas et al., 2020). In extreme situations, chronic exposure to cyber bullying has been associated with self-mutilation, suicidal thought, and school dropout. Its psychological impact does not only affect victims, but also other perpetrators and bystanders, who might be affected emotionally and behaviorally, such as feeling guilty, afraid and desensitized to violence. These results underscore the multifaceted and extensive effects of cyberbullying on the mental health of adolescents (Egbe et al., 2026).

Additionally, family support, peer relationship, school setting, and digital literacy among others are some of the factors that affect the psychological well-being of adolescents. Inadequate coping mechanisms and lack of awareness as well as a little intervention by parents or institutions may reinforce the adverse impacts of cyber bullying. In most situations, teenagers are reluctant to report Internet abuse because they fear being victimized, tend to be socially stigmatized, or they have limited access to the Internet. This will enable cyber bullying to continue and this will end up damaging the psychological health of the victims (Bali et al., 2023).

Since digital communication is becoming more popular and cyberbullying is becoming a common issue, it is necessary to develop knowledge about its effect on the psychological health of adolescent people (Gallegos et al., 2025) The investigation of this problem can help build the effective prevention strategies, mental health interventions, and supportive policies in educational institutions and communities. Through the analysis of the connection between cyberbullying and adolescent psychological well-being, the research intends to raise the concerns of the gravity of the issue and the need to have collective action that includes parents, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals to make the digital space safer among adolescents (Huang et al., 2023).

### **Problem of Statement**

Although the use of smartphones, social media and internet-based communication among teenagers in District Mansehra and Abbottabad is on the rise, not much empirical studies have been done to investigate the psychological impacts of cyber bullying in the areas. Online harassment, threats, and social exclusion continue to become more common among adolescents in such districts but are easily underreported because of the lack of awareness, fear of social stigma, and insufficient support mechanisms at the family and educational institutions levels. Lack of local data content renders schools, parents, and policymaker's incapable of comprehending to what

extent and in what patterns cyber bullying occurs and how it affects the psychological well-being of adolescents such as feelings of anxiety, depression, stress, and self-esteem problems. Moreover, the psychological harm of the victims may be exacerbated by cultural sensitivities and inadequate mental health resources in these regions. Hence, there is an urgent necessity to examine how cyberbullying affects the psychological health of the adolescents of District Mansehra and Abbottabad to inform the context-related prevention strategies, awareness campaigns, and policy intervention to create safer online spaces and enhance the mental health of adolescents.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To determine the prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents in Mansehra and Abbottabad.
2. To examine the psychological impact of cyberbullying on adolescents.
3. To analyze the relationship between cyberbullying and adolescent mental health.
4. To assess the role of family and school support in addressing cyberbullying.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review critically examines existing research on cyberbullying among adolescents, focusing on its nature and patterns, psychological consequences, links with mental health outcomes, and the protective role of family and educational institutions. The review draws on both global studies and emerging research in Pakistan to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and to establish a foundation for the present study conducted in District Mansehra and Abbottabad.

#### **Nature and Patterns of Cyberbullying in Adolescent Digital Spaces**

Cyberbullying is defined as intentional, repeated harm inflicted through electronic communication, including social media platforms, messaging applications, online games, and emails. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying offers aggressors anonymity, a potentially unlimited audience, and the ability to reach victims beyond physical spaces (Javed et al., 2025). These characteristics make it pervasive and uniquely stressful for adolescents. Studies indicate that between 10% and 40% of adolescents experience cyberbullying at some point during their school years, though prevalence varies based on region, culture, and measurement tools. In Pakistan, preliminary studies suggest rising rates of cyberbullying among urban and semi-urban adolescents, reflecting the growing accessibility of digital technologies and social media engagement (Kintonova et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying manifests in several forms, including online harassment, spreading rumors, social exclusion, impersonation, threats, and the sharing of embarrassing content. Research indicates that relational forms of cyberbullying, such as rumor-spreading and social exclusion, are particularly prevalent among female adolescents, while male adolescents may experience more direct forms of online aggression. Age patterns also reveal that early to mid-adolescents are at higher risk due to increased social media use, peer influence, and emotional sensitivity. The anonymity of online interactions often exacerbates aggression, allowing perpetrators to engage in behaviors they might avoid in face-to-face settings. Additionally, bystanders play a significant role in online environments, as their responses—ranging from active participation to passive observation can influence the impact and continuation of cyberbullying incidents (Huang et al., 2023).

The literature also highlights socio-cultural factors influencing cyberbullying patterns. Adolescents with limited digital literacy or awareness of online safety are more vulnerable, and cultural norms around respect, honor, and family reputation may inhibit reporting of incidents. Understanding these patterns is crucial for contextualizing cyberbullying within adolescent experiences in Mansehra and Abbottabad, where digital exposure is growing but institutional awareness and reporting mechanisms remain limited (Lin & Guo, 2025).

### **Psychological Consequences of Online Victimization During Adolescence**

The psychological effects of cyberbullying are enormous, both in terms of emotional well-being, social relationships and academic functioning. Young people who are victims of cyber-bullying often complain of terror, anxiety, depression, rage, and helplessness. Cyberbullying enters into personal and private space unlike traditional bullying that is usually limited to a particular time and place, making it seem as though one is under constant threat. Studies have indicated that such victims are likely to develop elevated levels of stress, isolate themselves socially and feel lonely, and this is likely to have negative impacts on their developmental functions in the adolescence period (Mladenović et al., 2021).

Empirical research has associated cyberbullying to increased rates of depression and anxiety. Negative feedback is usually absorbed by victims, which results in low self-esteem, emotional instability, and perennial worrying. According to longitudinal research, cyberbullying is a trigger that causes immediate distress but can also portend psychological challenges over time, such as depressive symptoms of lasting nature. Sleep disorders and headaches, as well as exhaustion, are additional psychosomatic symptoms that adolescents can have, which indicates the path-breaking effect of online harassment on mental and physical health (Sainz et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the academic activity is typically influenced. The stress and fear of interaction with peers may cause victims to avoid school, develop a low level of concentration, and demonstrate low academic performance. In extreme instances, cyber bullying has been linked to self-harming tendencies and suicidal thinking and thus the imminent requirement of effective interventions. Not only can the psychological effects on victims be observed, but also perpetrators can be aggressive, suffer feelings of guilt or even emotional regulation, and bystanders can be morally distressed, scared or socially anxious when they observe an event of online bullying (Singh, 2023).

### **Cyberbullying as a Predictor of Adolescent Mental Health Outcomes**

There is ample evidence that shows a high correlation between cyberbullying and other adverse mental health consequences in adolescents. The research always concludes that victims of cyberbullying have higher chances of developing depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional instability than their non-victimized counterparts. These mental health outcomes are not only short-term responses, as meta-analyses show that some of them may be long-term, influencing the social and academic development of adolescents (Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021).

Self-esteem is an important factor that comes out in this relationship. Teenagers tend to gauge their own self-esteem by means of social interactions, even online responses. Constant exposure to such negative statements, mockery or even social isolation may have a devastating effect on the self, making one vulnerable to another victimization and stress. The other most notable is anxiety; the victim could develop social anxiety, fear of interacting with online people, and hypervigilance to possible online threats, which can disrupt normal functioning and social development (Soldatova et al., 2024).

The study also puts emphasis on the reciprocal relationship of cyberbullying and mental health. Teenagers who already have some emotional or mental challenges can be more vulnerable to victimization, and the phenomenon of cyberbullying can aggravate or lead to mental health issues. It is in view of this intricate interaction that the individual vulnerabilities as well as environmental factors playing into mental health outcomes in relation to cyberbullying should be taken into consideration (Mladenović et al., 2021).

Among the Pakistani population, there is a growing body of emerging research that suggests potential cultural attitudes, stigma, and access to counseling services can increase the psychological effects of cyberbullying. Youngers might not want to receive assistance; thus, the adverse consequences will go unnoticed. Such results demonstrate that studies are necessary to analyze both direct and indirect impacts of cyberbullying on mental health of adolescents (Soldatova et al., 2024).

### **Protective Role of Family and Educational Institutions in Cyberbullying Contexts**

The family and school are the setting that is important to minimize the impact of cyberbullying and promote the mental well-being of adolescents. Research indicates that a good parental support, free communication and observing online activities may go a long way in lowering the chances of victimization. When adolescents have the support of their families, they are more likely to report cases of cyberbullying and seek assistance that can help them to endure the psychological distress. On the other hand, uninformed parents who are punitively responsive can unwillingly deter disclosure, and the teens get vulnerable (Javed et al., 2025).

Schools are other important guardian institutes. The reduction of cyberbullying and its psychological effects has been demonstrated with the use of anti-bullying policies, teacher awareness programs, and positive school climates. Schools where inclusiveness, mutual respect, and student interactions are encouraged, provide the space where adolescents can feel safer to report bullying and receive help. The participation of teachers and counselors is especially relevant in terms of the warning signs detection, emotional advice, and the linkage of victims to mental help (Soldatova et al., 2024).

It has been noted in research that most effective structures are those that involve collaboration between the families and schools. Adolescents can be empowered so that they can safely navigate online space through awareness programs, training in digital literacy, and counseling services (Kintonova et al., 2021). The scarcity of formal interventions in Pakistan especially in the semi-urban areas underscores the need to develop context-specific interventions which integrate cultural norms, parental roles and school-based policies. Knowing the protective factors, it is possible to develop interventions that will not only minimize cyberbullying but also improve resilience and psychological health of adolescents (Lin & Guo, 2025).

### **Methodology**

To determine the impact of cyberbullying on the psychological lives of adolescents in the Districts of Mansehra and Abbottabad, the study utilized a qualitative research method. The target group included adolescents (13-18 years old) and the sample included 30 participants chosen through purposive sampling and selecting those who had been subjected to cyberbullying or had experienced it in some way. Interviews were carried out in semi-structured format, so that participants could discuss their experiences freely and at the same time this gave the researcher the liberty to probe more on the subject. The research site encompassed the chosen schools and communities in Mansehra and Abbottabad to reflect a representative sample of adolescent's lives

in semi urban areas. Data gathered was analyzed with the six-step thematic analysis created by Braun and Clarke that included familiarization with the data, creation of first codes, theme searching, theme review, defining and naming themes, and final report. This method facilitated the ability to systematically determine trends and psychological effects of cyberbullying and maintain the richness and depth of how adolescents experience their lives. Ethical concerns were also rigorously adhered to such as the informed consent of the subjects and guardians, anonymity and confidentiality and free withdrawal of the subjects at any point.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section contains the major thematic conclusion based on the stories, shared by the participants, on their cyberbullying experiences and its psychological, social, and scholastic effects. In the form of thematic analysis, four thematic components interconnected with one another emerged, ultimately demonstrating the complex effects of cyberbullying on the health and overall functionality of adolescents.

### **Theme 1. Emotional Distress and Anxiety.**

Cyberbullying has a profound psychological effect on the victims, which is why emotional distress and anxiety were regularly reported. The respondents gave an account of fear, nervousness, and states of constant tension, which had an impact on daily life, sleep, and concentration.

#### **Narration 1**

*“The moment I open social media; my heart starts to race as I do not know what I am going to see. I am always nervous about any notification or comment, but mostly when someone employs a post about me without my permission. I continue to be thinking of what the people may say or think of me and imagine the negative reactions before reading them. This causes me to shun group chats and messaging applications altogether since I am afraid of being shamed once again. My thoughts never cease to race even at home; I feel restless and even basic activities such as reading or studying seem like a nightmare since I am always afraid of witnessing something that would make me ashamed.”*

#### **Narration 2**

*“When I get offensive messages, I feel work-stressed and exhausted. I never have peace of mind because I keep on replaying what has happened in my mind as I consider why people would choose to attack me and what other people will say. This worrying causes one to struggle to sleep or focus in school. The thoughts about the online harassment, even when I am trying to have fun, come back thus resulting in me being trapped. I experience chest tightness, and my hands shaky when I look at notifications, and I can always feel that I am being stalked by the cyberbullying and am mentally exhausted and scared to use the internet.”*

These accounts depict how cyber bullying causes severe emotional agony and anxiety, which interferes with the normal functioning and mental health. The physical aspects such as racing heart and restlessness demonstrate the effects of cyberbullying on the mind and the body. Embarrassment or humiliation also causes the fear of embarrassment or humiliation, which is also in line with the studies on anxiety as the fundamental psychological effect of online harassment.

## **Theme 2. Low Self-Esteem and Social Withdrawal**

Poor self-esteem and isolation were also established. According to the respondents, they were humiliated, embarrassed and judged and, as such, shunned both online and offline social interactions.

### **Narration 1**

*“As soon as embarrassing photos of me were published on the internet, I no longer joined group chats and communicated with classmates since I believed everyone was laughing at me. Friends showed even the slightest gestures, which made me nervous as I thought that they were putting me to the test. I ceased to post something on the Internet as I feared that it would be published once again. I am feeling like I am not visible and I am alone and at times I sit during breaks at school or I do not talk in classes because I do not want to be ridiculed. I feel as though I do not know what I can do, yet I have not managed to get myself out of the embarrassment, and this has caused me to question myself and my capabilities.”*

### **Narration 2**

*“I used to like getting involved in class activities at school, but when some posts made fun of me, I stopped talking in classes or expressing opinions. I none longer keep friends around me as I am always afraid of being mocked. It is weighty and stressful to be in social space as I am unable to concentrate on what others are posting about me online. I have begun to feel that I am inadequate and that my deeds are always evaluated in a negative way and this makes me even more isolated among my friends and peers.”*

These experiences present the way in which cyberbullying weakens self-confidence and promotes withdrawal. The intimidation of being judged and being humiliated once again makes the problem of isolation even more severe, which provides the support to the previous studies that relational cyberbullying has a detrimental effect on the social interactions and self-esteem of adolescents.

## **Theme 3. Academic Stress and Concentration Difficulties**

Respondents reported that cyberbullying interfered with their academic performance, causing stress and concentration difficulties. The mental preoccupation with harassment affected learning, classroom participation, and completion of school tasks.

### **Narration 1**

*“I cannot focus on my homework because I keep thinking about the messages and posts online. I worry about who might have seen them and what they think of me. This constant thinking distracts me and leaves me mentally exhausted. Sometimes I forget to submit assignments or do them carelessly because my mind is occupied with anxiety. Even when I sit down to study, I cannot concentrate. The fear of facing classmates who might have seen the posts makes school feel overwhelming, and it adds more stress to my daily routine.”*

### **Narration 2**

*“School has become a source of stress rather than learning. I constantly replay online interactions in my mind, worrying about how classmates or friends are judging me. During lessons, I struggle to focus because my attention drifts back to what was posted or shared about me. Sometimes, I even skip classes to avoid embarrassment. This anxiety prevents me from participating in class, completing tasks properly, or collaborating with peers. The constant pressure from online harassment makes academic life exhausting and affects my motivation to study.”*

These narrations show how cyberbullying negatively impacts academic engagement. Mental preoccupation with harassment, anxiety, and fear of judgment lead to distraction, school avoidance, and reduced performance. This aligns with previous studies showing cyberbullying's detrimental effect on academic outcomes.

#### **Theme 4. Role of Family and School Support**

Family and school support turned out to be one of the protective factors, as it assisted the respondents in coping with cyberbullying. Mentorship, consolation and action minimized the psychological impact.

##### **Narrations 1**

*“When I had a conversation with my parents about the offensive messages, I felt a lot calmer. They instructed me on the process of reporting the messages and blocking the individuals who post them. The fact that there was someone who could comprehend what I was going through helped me feel less alone. They told me that it was not my fault and assisted me in acting to secure myself in the Internet. This has made me more confident and I got the feeling that I am in control of the situation.”*

##### **Narration 2**

*“One of my teachers noticed that I was upset and made me talk privately with her. She reassured me that it is not my fault when it comes to cyberbullying and demonstrated how to keep myself safe on the internet. She advised me not to give up with the class and play with fellow classmates because she said that I am not alone and that there was help in case something arose again. Being aware that there was one in school who cares about me decreased my anxiety levels and helped me to go back to schoolwork and social life more readily.”*

These accounts emphasize the fact that family and school support have the ability to counterbalance the adverse consequences of cyberbullying. Emotional reassurance, guidance, and intervention equip the adolescents with coping skills, anxiety reduction, and resilience, which is in line with previous studies that highlight the role of social support in the mental health of adolescents.

#### **Discussion**

The results of this research paper point out the intense psychological effect of cyber bullying among teenagers in Mansehra and Abbottabad. The thematic analysis demonstrated that there were four key spheres that cyberbullying influenced: emotional distress and anxiety, low self-esteem and social withdrawal, academic stress and concentration problems, and the support of family and school. The respondents have always reported feeling anxious, fearful and mentally preoccupied because of online harassment, which is consistent with the current studies that reported cyber bullying evokes both emotional and physiological responses of heart racing, restlessness, and sleeplessness. These experiences indicate that cyberbullying is not merely a problem of online interactions but it spreads to the real life, and it has an impact on the mental health, sleep and capability to perform the ordinary activities (Lin & Guo, 2025).

Another important effect was low self-esteem and withdrawal. The respondents talked of humiliation, embarrassment, and fear of judgment, which resulted in the avoidance of online and offline socializations. This observation can be attributed to other earlier studies that show that relational cyberbullying compromises self-confidence and social interaction. The negative experience internalization forms the cycle of isolation, which decreases the degree of peer support

and predisposes the person to psychological distress. The threat of being judged also added to the anxiety, which strengthened the avoidance, restricted the possibility of social learning and social interaction (Javed et al., 2025).

Three respondents often referred to academic stress and concentration issues. The persistent psychological obsession with computer harassment interfered with concentration, caused procrastination in school assignments and in extreme cases, resulted in school phobia. This shows the indirect influence of cyberbullying on academic performance, which confirms the previous studies that show the connection between being harassed on the Internet with low academic performance, attention deficits, and low motivation. The respondents identified stress and fear of being judged by peers to have a negative impact on classroom interactions and learning in general, which indicates that cyberbullying can do more than ruin psychological health as it can also impair cognitive and academic growth of teenagers (Soldatova et al., 2024).

Family and school support were also highlighted as a safeguard factor as was found. Parental and teacher emotional support, assurance, and intervention were seen to alleviate the negative impact of cyberbullying. Based on the feedback, respondents also pointed out that knowledge, encouragement, and practical advice enabled them to overcome the challenges and restore their confidence. This is consistent with researchers who have found social support as an important buffer to the psychological effects of cyberbullying which underlines the need to actively involve parents and provide students with supportive school settings. Nonetheless, the results also could provoke the notion that in the absence of this support, the adverse effects of cyberbullying may turn out to be more serious and long-lasting (Mladenović et al., 2021).

On the whole, the paper highlights the complex nature of cyberbullying effects on the mental health of adolescents, their social life, and performance in school. It shows the acute necessity of the awareness programs and preventive strategies and interventions at the family, as well as institutional levels. To effectively solve the problem of cyberbullying, the holistic approach involving emotional, social, and educational support is necessary to protect the well-being of adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, cyberbullying has a vast impact on the psychological health of adolescents, which causes anxiety, low self-esteem, withdrawal, and academic challenges. Through the experiences of the respondents, it is evident that online harassment is an extensive problem that is not only found online but also in real life, where it impacts not only emotional and social functioning but also social life as well. Although these impacts can be alleviated by the supportive family and school setting, specific interventions, sensitization efforts, and prevention approaches are urgently required to curb cyberbullying and enhance resilience in teenagers. Cyberbullying is a problem that should be tackled through the collaboration of parents, teachers, peers, and policymakers to establish a safe and inclusive environment. Early detection, regular observation, and teaching young people about the importance of being responsible on the internet can empower adolescents to move through the internet with an assuring air and mitigate the psychological impacts of cyberbullying in the long run.

## **Recommendations**

**Parental Awareness Programs:** Hold workshops and seminars to inform parents about the need to identify the indicators of cyberbullying and offer emotional support.

**Policies on School-Based Cyberbullying:** Establish transparent policies and reporting lines to deal with the cases of cyberbullying as soon as possible and efficiently.

**Psychological Counseling Services:** Form counseling departments in schools to offer the adolescents professional advice and coping mechanisms.

**Digital Literacy and Safety Training:** Train students on safe internet practices, privacy and responsible social media use.

**Peer Support Groups:** Peer support groups are encouraged to encourage empathy, mutual understanding, and joint problem resolution among the students.

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