

A Systematic review of published academic articles in the field of cyberbullying

Bekir Balaban*

Character and Values Education Department, Erciyes University, Kayseri, Türkiye
ORCID : 0009-0006-0746-837X

Neşet Mutlu

Department of Basic Education, Erciyes University, Kayseri, Türkiye
ORCID : 0000-0002-3378-4986

Article history	This study aims to analyze the general trends, methodological characteristics, and thematic focuses of academic articles published on cyberbullying between 2015 and 2024. Specifically, it systematically examines the primary research approaches, identified typologies of cyberbullying, and the core findings derived from the selected literature. In this regard, this systematic review explores contemporary trends in cyberbullying research by evaluating 33 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2024. Guided by the PRISMA framework, the study systematically analyzes methodological approaches, behavioral typologies, and core empirical findings. The literature indicates a pronounced proliferation of cyberbullying studies post-2020, corresponding directly with the escalation of digital interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Typological analysis identifies threats, rumor dissemination, identity theft, privacy violations, ethno-religious cyberhate, and sexting as the predominant behaviors. These acts precipitate severe psychological sequelae for victims, notably anger, depression, social withdrawal, and conflict avoidance. Furthermore, distinct gender dynamics are evident; males demonstrate a higher propensity for perpetration, whereas females exhibit higher reporting rates-a divergence largely attributable to societal gender norms. Regarding mitigation, active parental mediation proved significantly more efficacious than restrictive strategies, which may occasionally yield counterproductive outcomes. Ultimately, this review underscores the imperative for proactive interventions, advocating for specialized educator training, early digital citizenship education, broader public awareness initiatives, and the integration of game-based learning applications to effectively combat cyberbullying.
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Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies and the pervasive use of the internet have positioned cyberbullying as a defining challenge of the contemporary era. Manifesting across digital platforms, this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among youth, drawing significant

*Correspondency: balabanbekir@gmail.com

scholarly attention due to its severe psychological and social ramifications (Giumetti, & Kowalski, 2022; Llorent & Núñez-Flores, 2024). As social media and digital tools become deeply integrated into daily life, cyberbullying has transcended behavioral misconduct to emerge as a critical public health and societal issue, predominantly affecting children and adolescents (Zhu et al., 2021).

Conceptually, cyberbullying represents the manifestation of traditional bullying within digital environments (Smith et al., 2008). Because harmful content can disseminate rapidly online, scholars note that cyberbullying often exerts a more severe impact than its traditional counterpart (Nikolaou, 2017). While it shares the three core elements of traditional bullying—intent to harm, behavioral repetition, and power asymmetry (Law et al., 2012)—the digital landscape introduces unique characteristics that distinguish it from in-person offenses (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). For instance, perpetrators can easily conceal their identities, leaving many victims unaware of their attackers (Heirman & Walrave, 2008), and harmful materials can be instantly broadcast to vast audiences (Druck & Kaplowitz, 2005). Furthermore, ubiquitous internet access allows the abuse to permeate the victim's home—traditionally a safe haven—rendering the harassment inescapable and constant (Shariff & Hoff, 2007). Compounding the issue, victims are often reluctant to report these incidents, frequently fearing the confiscation of their digital devices or restricted internet access (Heirman & Walrave, 2008). Consequently, cyberbullying has the potential to inflict far greater psychosocial and emotional damage than traditional bullying (Englander et al., 2017).

The etiology of cyberbullying is rooted in a complex interplay of individual, social, and technological factors. Primary psychological catalysts include diminished empathy (Kowalski et al., 2014), elevated aggression and impulsivity (Festl et al., 2013), the pursuit of social dominance among peers (Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 2002), and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Furthermore, prior victimization frequently precipitates retaliatory bullying, a dynamic known as the victim-bully cycle (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhang & Sha, 2024). Environmental risks, such as peer group bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2004), inadequate parental supervision, and poor parent-child communication, further exacerbate this vulnerability (Li, 2006). Technologically, the anonymity afforded by the internet emboldens perpetrators by mitigating the fear of repercussions (Slonje & Smith, 2008). This is compounded by the "Online Disinhibition Effect," wherein individuals exhibit aggressive online behaviors they would typically suppress in face-to-face interactions (Suler, 2004). Finally, the physical distance between the perpetrator and the victim's immediate emotional response impedes the formation of an empathetic connection (Sticca & Perren, 2013).

The consequences of cyberbullying for victims are profound, spanning psychological, social, and academic domains. Victimization has been strongly correlated with psychological distress, including frustration, depression, anger, diminished self-esteem (Willard, 2006), chronic sadness (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011), severe loneliness, and self-injurious behaviors (Balakrishnan et al., 2020). Notably, victims face a heightened risk of exhibiting depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Maurya et al., 2022; McLoughlin et al., 2019). Socially, a positive correlation exists between cybervictimization and social anxiety (Suárez-García et al., 2020; Núñez et al., 2021), often compelling victims to withdraw from peer interactions due to an intense fear of negative evaluation (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). The academic ramifications are equally detrimental; victims plagued by insecurity and anxiety frequently exhibit increased school absenteeism and a corresponding decline in academic performance (Azizi & Kishi, 2024; Lu et al., 2025).

International research underscores cyberbullying as a pervasive global crisis, fundamentally exacerbated by the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and expansive social media engagement (DataReportal, 2021). The literature presents sobering data regarding its prevalence. While some estimates suggest that 20% to 40% of youth have encountered cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010), a comprehensive 30-country study by UNICEF (2020) reported victimization rates exceeding 33%. Regional studies echo these findings; approximately 50% of youth in the United States (Haidar et al., 2017) and between 20.9% and 44.2% of youth across various Arab nations have reported victimization (Haidar et al., 2017). However, scholarly consensus on the trajectory of these rates remains fractured. While Zhu et al. (2021) observed a dramatic global increase over a five-year period (2015-2019)-with victimization reaching 58% and perpetration 46%-Olweus (2012) argued that such claims are overstated, maintaining that cyberbullying remains a relatively low-prevalence phenomenon that largely overlaps with, rather than creates distinct victims from, traditional bullying.

To systematically examine this evolving landscape, the primary objective of the present study is to analyze academic articles on cyberbullying published between 2015 and 2024. Utilizing the keyword "cyberbullying," this systematic review focuses specifically on literature indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database within the field of educational research. The study explores both the general awareness of cyberbullying and the contemporary interventions developed to mitigate it. Specifically, this research seeks to address the overarching question: "What are the general trends, methodological characteristics, and thematic focuses of academic articles published on cyberbullying between 2015 and 2024?" This primary inquiry, alongside its subsequent sub-questions, drives the analytical framework of the review:

- (1) What are the primary methodological approaches employed in the reviewed literature?
- (2) What typologies of cyberbullying are identified within the selected studies?
- (3) What are the core findings derived from the analyzed articles?

Method

In this study, a systematic review methodology was employed to examine academic literature on cyberbullying published between 2015 and 2024. A systematic review is a rigorous research approach that involves a comprehensive literature search within a defined framework, synthesizing findings based on strictly established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Widely recognized for yielding highly reliable data for evidence-based practice, this method aims to distill complex and fragmented research outcomes into coherent, structured, and actionable insights.

Data Collection

This systematic review adhered strictly to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). The application of the PRISMA protocol bolsters the rigor of the research, ensuring a transparent, auditable, and reproducible synthesis. The initial "Identification" phase involved a comprehensive search across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, utilizing the keyword "cyberbullying." The overall scope of this review comprised academic journal articles published between 2015 and 2024. To ensure the relevance and quality of the synthesized data, the following eligibility parameters were established:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Publication within the 2015–2024 timeframe.
- A primary and direct thematic focus on cyberbullying.
- Publication in international, peer-reviewed, and indexed journals.

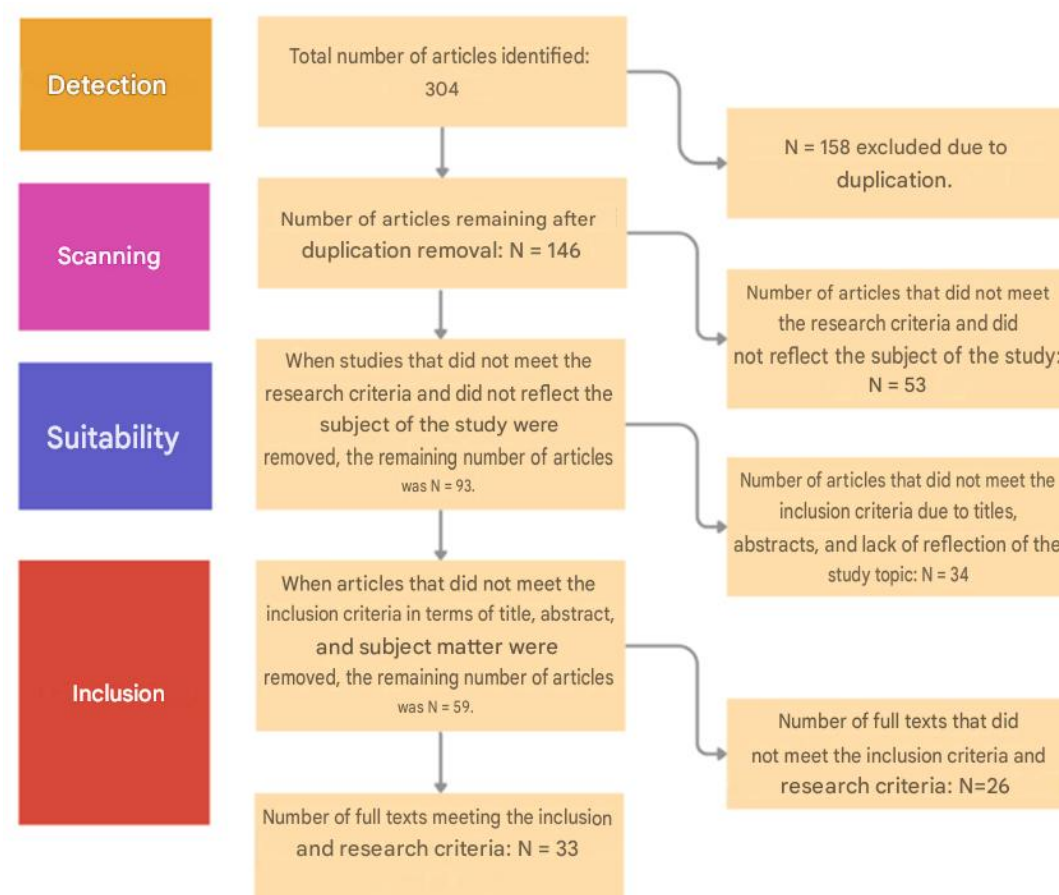
Exclusion Criteria:

- Tangential or indirect relevance to cyberbullying.
- Inaccessibility of the full-text manuscript.
- Duplicate records or redundant datasets.

Election Process of the Studies

The study selection process adhered to the four primary phases of the PRISMA protocol: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. To minimize selection bias, title and abstract screening, followed by a full-text review, were conducted independently by two researchers. The selection process, delineated in Figure 1, proceeded as follows: Initially, 304 articles were identified through database searches. During the screening phase, 158 duplicate records were removed. The remaining 146 unique articles underwent title and abstract screening, resulting in the exclusion of 53 articles that lacked topical relevance or failed to meet the inclusion criteria. In the eligibility phase, the full texts of the remaining 93 articles were rigorously assessed. Of these, 34 were excluded due to thematic misalignment identified upon closer inspection, and 26 were excluded for failing to satisfy specific research criteria. The rationale for each exclusion was systematically documented. Consequently, in the inclusion phase, a total of 33 articles met all criteria and formed the final sample (the basis for evidence synthesis) of this systematic review.

Figure 1. Selection process of the journal articles



Data Analysis

In this study, a systematic document analysis technique was employed to examine the 33 articles included in the review. As a fundamental qualitative research method, document analysis facilitates the rigorous evaluation of textual data relevant to the research objectives. During the analytical process, information from the selected articles was systematically extracted and coded within a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The content of each study was thoroughly analyzed and categorized according to predefined parameters. To enhance the clarity and interpretability of the results, all findings derived from this comprehensive data extraction and classification process have been visualized using tables and graphs.

Findings

In this section, the findings synthesized from the selected articles are thematically grouped and analyzed. In alignment with the study's primary objectives, general trends in cyberbullying research, the methodological approaches employed, and the specific sub-themes addressed are examined in detail. Accordingly, the findings are presented under the following headings.

Publications by Primary Methodological Approaches

The methodological distribution of the 33 examined articles highlights distinct research trends within the cyberbullying literature (Table 1). The findings demonstrate a pronounced reliance on the quantitative research paradigm. Specifically, quantitative methods account for the vast majority of the reviewed literature ($n = 27$; 81.8%), while mixed-methods ($n = 4$; 12.1%) and qualitative approaches ($n = 2$; 6.1%) remain markedly underrepresented. Within the quantitative subset, descriptive survey designs constitute the predominant methodological choice, underpinning 24 of the 27 quantitative studies. This distribution underscores a strong preference for survey-based data collection, highlighting a significant gap in qualitative explorations of the phenomenon.

Table 1. Number of publications by research methods

Main Method Category	Research Model	f	cf
Quantitative Methods	Descriptive Model (Survey Research)	24	27
	Causal-Comparative Model	1	
	Quasi-Experimental Model	1	
	Comparative Study	1	
Qualitative Methods	Phenomenology	1	2
	Critical Analysis	1	
Mixed Methods	Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Data	4	4
Total			33

Publications by Typologies of Cyberbullying Are Identified

Table 2 presents a thematic taxonomy of the reviewed studies based on the specific typologies of cyberbullying investigated. The diverse manifestations of cyberbullying documented in the literature were stratified into five overarching categories. In the context of communication mediums (e.g., A1, A4, A8, A26, A31), the evidence underscores that cyberbullying proliferates across multiple digital ecosystems, including social media networks, email, and instant messaging platforms. When categorized by behavioral manifestation (e.g., A12, A22, A23, A33), the literature predominantly highlights adversarial actions such as name-calling, rumor dissemination, systematic exclusion, threats, and identity theft. Furthermore, a content-centric analysis (e.g., A17, A20, A21, A28) reveals a distinct scholarly focus on targeted malicious material, particularly ethno-religious cyberhate, sexting, and directed hate speech.

Table 2. Classification of studies according to the types of cyberbullying

Category	Types of Cyberbullying	Article Code
Communication Tools	Cyberbullying via mobile phones and computers	A1
	Cyberbullying on social media platforms	A4, A8, A31
	Email, audio/video messages, text messages, social media posts, tweets	A26
Behavior Type	Name calling, rumor spreading, threats, sexting	A12
	Online harassment, threats, gossip, exclusion, identity theft, privacy violations	A23
	Verbal, visual, exclusion, impersonation	A22
	Peer pressure, online harassment, identity theft, privacy violation	A33
Content Based	Religious and ethnically based cyber hate (insults, threats, harassment, exclusion)	A17
	Sexting	A20, A28
	Cyberbullying, hate speech, offensive language	A21
Digital Citizenship and Ethics	Media balance, privacy and security, digital footprint, relationships and communication	A11, A29
	Cyber wisdom and digital citizenship education	A32
Mixed/General	All kinds of cyberbullying through electronic means	A2
	Physical bullying, verbal bullying, isolation, gossip, destruction of property	A19
	General measurements of cyberbullying and cybervictimization	A25

Publications by Core Findings Derived From

Table 3 presents a thematic synthesis of the primary findings extracted from the reviewed literature, categorized into eight distinct domains. In terms of prevalence, the data reveal alarmingly high victimization rates; for instance, 82% of students (A3) and over half of the surveyed cohort (A23) reported experiencing cyberbullying. Demographic analyses (A6, A23) consistently indicate that male students demonstrate a significantly higher propensity for perpetration. The psychological toll on victims is profound, with one study (A23) documenting anger and depressive symptoms in 70% and 43% of victims, respectively. To mitigate these risks, the literature underscores the critical role of the family; specifically, active and instructive parental mediation has been shown to effectively reduce cyberbullying incidents (A4, A17, A30). At the institutional level, proactive measures are evident, with 67% of K-5 educators utilizing digital citizenship curricula (A11) and 85% of schools enforcing social media policies (A13). Furthermore, regarding prevention strategies, several studies (A10, A14, A16) corroborate the efficacy of innovative interventions, notably game-based learning and storytelling applications.

Table 3. Classification of studies according to research main findings

Category	Key Findings	Article Code
Prevalence and Types of Cyberbullying	82% of students are exposed to cyberbullying and 42% to face-to-face bullying	A3
	More than 50% of participants have experienced cyberbullying.	A23
	The most common types are: insults, gossip, and social exclusion	
	Three profiles: Low level bullying (87.6%), moderate level victim bully (10%), high level bully (2.4%)	A27
Gender and Age Factors	69.9% of bullies are boys and 30.1% are girls	A6
	Female students tend to report more	A22
	Male students committed more cyberbullying than female students	A23
Emotional and Psychological Effects	Cyberbullies overestimate the distress their victims will experience	A1
	Victims show lower social presence and avoid conflict	A15
	70% of victims experienced anger and 43% experienced depression	A23
Parental and Family Factors	Active and restrictive parental mediation reduces cyberbullying	A4
	Instructive parent mediation reduces victimization	A17
	Active parental mediation reduces cyberbullying, while restrictive mediation increases it	A30
Educator and School Factors	Four clusters of educators: “directors” (65%), “disinterested” (14%), “interested” (12%), “all methods users” (9%)	A2
	67% of K-5 teachers use digital citizenship curriculum	A11
	85% of schools have social media usage rules	A13
Intervention and Prevention Programs	Game-based approach improves digital citizenship behaviors	A10
	Storytelling-based mobile app found effective	A14
	The gaming group showed higher levels of cognitive empathy	A16
Technology Use and Digital Competence	72.1% of participants use mobile phones	A6
	Social media use increases creativity through knowledge sharing	A8
	Active participation provides better learning outcomes	A29
Politics and Administration	94-99% of managers see risky internet use as a serious problem	A7
	Phone ban should be considered as a social opportunity rather than a technical solution.	A18
	Cyberwisdom: literacy, reasoning, motivation, and self-reflection	A32

Discussion and Conclusion

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the research findings. The results are critically evaluated by comparing them against existing theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies. Based on these evaluations, practical recommendations and directions for future research are proposed. Overall, the findings of this study largely corroborate the existing

literature, while also offering complementary insights in several key areas. A detailed comparative analysis of the current findings in relation to the broader literature is structured under the following headings:

Publications by Primary Methodological Approaches

An examination of the methodological approaches in cyberbullying research reveals a distinct predominance of quantitative methods, with survey-based instruments serving as the primary data collection tool (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zych et al., 2015). This trend underscores a broader preference within the field to utilize large samples to yield generalizable empirical outcomes (Selkie et al., 2016). Ultimately, the heavy reliance on quantitative designs reflects a concerted effort to operationalize a complex psychosocial phenomenon through measurable and comparable metrics (Barlett et al., 2014).

Consistent with this established trend, the present review confirms that quantitative studies constitute the vast majority of the examined literature (27 out of 33 articles). This methodological dominance strongly aligns with the systematic review conducted by Jadambaa et al. (2019), who noted that all 21 studies in their sample employed quantitative approaches, predominantly utilizing cross-sectional designs. Similarly, Patchin and Hinduja (2011) have highlighted the distinct advantages of this paradigm, particularly its capacity to facilitate large-scale assessments and effectively determine prevalence rates. Furthermore, the findings of the current study closely mirror the comprehensive review by Zych et al. (2015), which analyzed 309 cyberbullying articles published between 2004 and 2014, revealing that 82% utilized quantitative methods, while mixed (10%) and qualitative (8%) approaches remained markedly limited.

Publications by Typologies of Cyberbullying Are Identified

Regarding the primary settings for cyberbullying, Evangelio et al. (2022) examined 42 studies (2010–2021) and identified social media as the most common arena for cyber-aggression. Likewise, five articles in the present study highlighted social media platforms as central conduits for cyberbullying, a parallel that underscores the critical role of digital environments in these dynamics.

In terms of behavioral typologies, findings frequently identified threats, rumor dissemination, identity theft, and privacy violations. This aligns closely with Navarro et al. (2018) and is further supported by Rosa et al. (2019), who noted the high prevalence of threats and harassment in their review of automated detection studies. However, this research extends beyond the predominantly text-based analyses of these prior reviews. By incorporating highly contextualized forms of abuse—such as social exclusion and identity theft—this study offers a broader and more comprehensive behavioral perspective to the existing literature.

Furthermore, content-based analyses in this review revealed the prominence of specific malicious content, notably ethno-religious hate speech and sexually explicit messaging. These findings are consistent with Chicote-Beato et al. (2024), who identified demographic-based hate speech as a prevalent issue among elementary students. Additionally, while this study fully corroborates Calvo-Morata et al.'s (2020) findings that digital exclusionary behaviors (e.g., omission from group chats or photos) trigger severe psychological distress—such as anger,

depression, and social withdrawal—this synthesis places an additional critical focus on targeted toxic content. This distinction reflects the multidimensional nature of cyberbullying. Finally, Calvo-Morata et al.'s advocacy for game-based interventions serves as a highly effective complement to the digital citizenship and empathy-building programs proposed in present study.

Publications by Core Findings Derived From

Significant findings regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying emerged from this review. Notably, 9 of the 33 examined articles indicate that cyberbullying prevalence has reached alarming levels. These results are highly consistent with the findings of Jenaro et al. (2018). In their systematic review of adult cyberbullying between 2010 and 2017, they found an average victimization rate of 35%, which fluctuated based on gender, occupation, and online behavior. In parallel, analysis of this study confirmed that victimization rates vary significantly across demographic characteristics.

Regarding the psychological impacts, the reviewed literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that victims frequently experience anger, depression, diminished social engagement, and conflict avoidance. While these psychosocial consequences parallel those of traditional bullying, they are often exacerbated by the unique nature of digital platforms—such as 24/7 accessibility, broad audience reach, and the permanence of online content. These findings strongly align with previous systematic reviews underscoring the severe psychosocial toll of cyberbullying (Jenaro et al., 2018; Navarro et al., 2018).

Broader empirical research further corroborates these adverse psychological trajectories. For instance, Kumar and Goldstein (2020) highlighted those cyberbullying victims frequently report physical symptoms, including recurring stomachaches, headaches, and sleep disturbances, alongside elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. This is further supported by Kowalski et al. (2014), whose meta-analysis confirmed a robust correlation between cyber-victimization and increased psychosomatic complaints.

The landscape of cyberbullying is evolving rapidly due to the integration of advanced technologies. Recent scholarly evidence suggests that artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms are now critical in the real-time detection and mitigation of cyber-victimization, providing more proactive intervention capabilities than traditional moderation tools (Smith & Chen, 2026). This technological advancement represents a shift toward automated monitoring, which allows for the identification of malicious patterns, such as cyber-harassment, before they result in long-term psychological damage to the victim (Gomez et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the emergence of generative AI has facilitated new forms of digital abuse, specifically deepfake-based harassment within educational settings. This phenomenon poses a significant threat to student well-being, as AI-generated visual and auditory misinformation can be used to perpetuate social exclusion and reputational harm, necessitating urgent updates to digital citizenship curricula to include media literacy focused on synthetic media (Al-Harbi, 2026).

Recommendations

Based on the synthesized findings, the following recommendations are proposed for educators, parents, and researchers:

Educational institutions should implement specialized training programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills to identify, prevent, and intervene in cyberbullying incidents. Given the proven efficacy of game-based approaches and storytelling applications in fostering digital citizenship and empathy, educators are strongly encouraged to integrate these interactive pedagogies into their curricula. Furthermore, digital citizenship education must be mandated from an early age. Addressing the identified gender disparities also requires tailored interventions; schools must develop targeted strategies to mitigate perpetration tendencies among male students while enhancing post-victimization support and reporting mechanisms for female students.

The findings underscore that active and instructive parental mediation significantly reduces cyberbullying, whereas restrictive mediation can inadvertently yield counterproductive outcomes. Therefore, parents should prioritize open communication and guidance-based approaches over strict surveillance. Parents are advised to foster ongoing dialogue about internet safety, actively listen to their children, and serve as role models for ethical digital behavior. Given that a vast majority of victims experience severe anger and depression, it is crucial for parents to monitor for sudden behavioral shifts and promptly consult mental health professionals when necessary. Ultimately, fortifying the collaborative framework between schools and parents is essential.

Future research directions are shaped by the methodological trends and gaps identified in this review. To counterbalance the current overreliance on quantitative paradigms, scholars are urged to embrace methodological diversity, particularly through the expanded use of qualitative and mixed-methods designs. This will facilitate a deeper understanding of the subjective and contextual dimensions of cyber-victimization. Moreover, there is a critical need for longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term developmental impacts of cyberbullying. Finally, future scholarship should prioritize cross-cultural comparative analyses, rigorously investigate the psychosomatic/physical health consequences of cyberbullying, and proactively explore novel forms of digital harassment emerging alongside rapid technological advancements

Declarations

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Statement of Use of Large Language Models

Gemini and Grammarly AI tools were utilized solely for the purpose of language editing and text organization in this manuscript. The authors assume full responsibility for all content, findings, and conclusions presented in this study.

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