



The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescent Mental Health, and Law Enforcement in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the psychosocial and academic impacts experienced by high school students as victims of cyberbullying. The main objective of this study is to identify the forms of digital bullying experienced by students and explore the emotional and social responses that arise as a result of the incident. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five students who were victims of cyberbullying, direct observation in the school environment, and supporting documentation. The results of the study showed that all respondents experienced psychological stress such as deep shame, excessive anxiety, and fear in social interactions, both online and offline. In addition, cyberbullying also has an impact on decreased concentration in learning, academic achievement, and reluctance to participate in school activities. The variation in social support received by victims also shows a significant gap in the student assistance and protection system at school. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of collaborative interventions between schools, families, and digital communities to build a comprehensive detection, assistance, and recovery system for victims of cyberbullying. This study also recommends strengthening digital literacy and legal education as part of a long-term preventive strategy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has triggered a fundamental transformation in the way humans interact, not only in the professional and educational realms, but also in the most personal social spaces. The internet and social media, which were originally created to facilitate connectivity, have now become complex social arenas with interaction dynamics that are not always positive (Mudjiyanto et al., 2024). This phenomenon is most evident in the increasing number of cyberbullying cases, a form of digital-based psychological violence that continues to increase, especially among adolescents. Indonesia, as the country with the fourth largest number of social media users in the world, faces serious challenges in dealing with the destructive impacts of cyberbullying, both socially, psychologically, and legally.

Cyberbullying, as defined by Agustin et al., (2024) is a repeated aggressive act carried out intentionally through digital devices to hurt or humiliate the victim. This form of bullying is not only verbal and emotional, but can also lead to violations of privacy, the distribution of unauthorized content, and doxing. The main characteristic that distinguishes cyberbullying from conventional forms of bullying is its asynchronous nature and

is not limited to a specific time and place. Syamantha & Afriza's study (2022) states that the impact of cyberbullying can last longer and be more damaging because the digital traces left behind are permanent and can spread widely virally. For adolescents, who are in the phase of identity formation and unstable emotions, this experience can be a long-term trauma.

The phenomena revealed in the field study strengthen the urgency of this problem as a contemporary challenge in the educational and psychosocial realm of adolescents. Based on the results of initial observations and in-depth interviews with a number of guidance and counseling teachers at the secondary school level, a significant increase was found in reports of student complaints related to the phenomenon of digital bullying or cyberbullying over the past two years. Educators revealed that victims of cyber violence often experience real psychosomatic symptoms, such as a tendency to withdraw from social interactions, a drastic decline in academic achievement, and manifestations of sleep disorders and intense social anxiety. In one striking case study, a grade XI student at a public high school in East Java experienced deep psychological stress due to the spread of insulting content in her class WhatsApp group. Ironically, both teachers and parents do not have the capacity and understanding to carry out effective interventions, so that the problem continues without significant and holistic handling.

Literature review shows that cyberbullying has become a global concern, with various studies trying to uncover the motives of perpetrators, the impact on victims, and the effectiveness of available protection mechanisms. Research by Amalia et al., (2025) highlighted that the existence of regulations and policies alone is not enough without increasing digital awareness and social empathy among young users. Another study by Suriani et al., (2024) stated that they identified a close relationship between the intensity of social media use and the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying, especially in the 13–17 year old age group. Meanwhile, a study by Dolev-Cohen & Levkovich, (2021) in Israel emphasized the importance of the role of schools in creating a safe digital ecosystem through a digital literacy curriculum and an effective incident reporting system. However, the majority of this research focuses on the global context or developed countries, while contextual research in Indonesia, especially examining social and institutional protection mechanisms for adolescent victims, is still very limited.

The research gap that emerged from the review is the absence of an in-depth study that integrates the phenomenon of adolescent cyberbullying in Indonesia with a multi-perspective approach that includes psychosocial, institutional, and cultural dimensions. The majority of studies in Indonesia are still descriptive and have not systematically explained how institutions such as schools, families, and local governments play a role in handling and preventing cyberbullying. In addition, there are not many studies that explicitly highlight how low digital literacy in adolescents exacerbates their vulnerability to cyberbullying, and how intervention strategies can be designed based on local realities and developing social values.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary and contextual approach, with a special focus on the dynamics of adolescents in the digital era in the Indonesian social context. This study combines sociological, psychological, and educational approaches to holistically dissect how adolescents experience, understand, and respond to cyberbullying. In addition, this study will also present an analysis of school- and community-based intervention models that have not been widely explored in previous studies. Another novelty is the use of a phenomenological qualitative approach that allows for a deeper exploration of the subjective experiences of cyberbullying victims, thereby depicting the emotional and psychological landscape that is often hidden from quantitative statistics.

Based on the background and urgency that has been described, the main objective of this study is to analyze in depth the experiences of adolescent victims of cyberbullying and evaluate the extent to which the social system around them is able to provide effective protection. This study aims to fill the gap in the scientific literature related to local dynamics in a global context, as well as provide concrete recommendations for the formulation of policies, school programs, and digital education that are more sensitive to the psychosocial needs of adolescents. It is hoped that the results of this study will not only provide academic contributions, but also encourage changes in policies and social practices that are more protective of the younger generation in the digital era.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach focused on high school students who are victims of cyberbullying. The purpose of this approach is to deeply understand the personal experiences

of victims and the impacts caused by the incident in their social and psychological context. Data were collected through several techniques, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The subjects of the study consisted of five students who had experienced cyberbullying in the past two years. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that researchers could explore information flexibly, while maintaining focus on the main topic. Questions in the interview included the victims' experiences during cyberbullying, the emotional and psychological impacts felt, and the forms of support they received from their immediate environment, such as family, friends, and school.

To ensure the validity of the data, researchers used source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing and confirming data from various parties involved, namely students as victims, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, and parents of students. This aims to strengthen the accuracy and reliability of the information obtained. After the data collection process, analysis was conducted using the interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which includes three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data reduction process is carried out by filtering important information that is relevant to the focus of the study. Furthermore, the selected data is presented systematically in the form of a thematic matrix and narrative, making it easier to identify important patterns. The final stage is drawing conclusions that are reflective and based on empirical findings, with the hope of being able to provide a comprehensive picture of the experiences and psychological conditions of students who are victims of cyberbullying.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The results of in-depth interview analysis with five high school students who were victims of cyberbullying revealed that all respondents experienced quite intense psychological stress after facing online bullying. The most prominent psychosocial impacts were deep shame, excessive anxiety, and significant fear in social interactions, both in the real world and digital environments. One informant, NauFal (17 years old), said that his fear of accessing Instagram arose due to constant worry about insulting posts. He added that even though he was not online, feelings of restlessness and anxiety continued to haunt him constantly. This condition reflects long-lasting psychological trauma and persistent emotional disturbances, even though contact with digital media has ended. This finding is consistent with the study by Putra et al., (2025) which showed that individuals who are victims of cyberbullying tend to experience anxiety disorders, depression, and social isolation, which significantly disrupt the psychosocial functioning of adolescents.

The variations in the forms of cyberbullying experienced by respondents were very diverse, ranging from teasing that touched on physical aspects such as insults related to body shape, to defamation and verbal sexual harassment spread through social media platforms. Another respondent, Desi Safitri (16 years old), said that her personal photos were spread with sexually suggestive comments by an anonymous account, which caused deep trauma and made her reluctant to access her social media accounts again. This phenomenon is consistent with the UNICEF report (2021) which states that cyberbullying with sexual content, physical insults, and digital reputation destruction are the most prevalent forms among adolescents globally (Hanafi Cahya Putra, 2024). Furthermore, research by Maghfiroh et al., (2024) revealed that cyberbullying not only has an impact on the mental health of victims, but also significantly affects social and academic aspects. These findings emphasize that social media does not merely function as a medium of communication, but also has the potential to become an arena for psychological violence that has a destructive impact on the mental and social well-being of young users.

Therefore, interventions based on education and psychosocial support need to be designed comprehensively to reduce these negative impacts, as suggested by Seneru et al., (2024) who proposed a cyberbullying prevention and mitigation model through collaboration between schools, families, and digital communities.

Table 1. Research Results on the Impact of Cyberbullying on High School Students

No	Respondent Initials	Type of Cyberbullying Experienced	Psychological Impact	Academic Impact	Victim's Response	Support from Environment
1	Naufal (17 y.o.)	Physical mockery through Instagram comments	Anxiety, shame, fear of socializing	Decline in academic performance	Avoided social media	Received support from parents
2	Desi Safitri (16 y.o.)	Circulation of photo with sexual comments	Trauma, feeling unsafe	Difficulty focusing on studies	Temporarily deactivated account	No support from school
3	Yoga Kurniyawan (17 y.o.)	Defamation in class WhatsApp group	Stress, feelings of isolation	Decreased motivation and performance	Isolated at home	Support from school counselor
4	Liza Zakiya (16 y.o.)	Verbal harassment and body shaming on TikTok	Mild depression, withdrawal	Missed several days of school	Consulted school psychologist	No support from peers
5	Mahrus Rofik (17 y.o.)	Threats and insulting messages from anonymous account	Sleep disturbances, self-harm urges	Drastic decline in academic performance	Self-harm (once)	No attention from parents

This study found that cyberbullying has a very significant psychological impact on high school students who are victims. Based on in-depth interviews with five students, all respondents reported experiencing emotional stress in the form of shame, anxiety, and fear that interfered with their social activities. Naufal, one of the 17-year-old respondents, stated that he was afraid to open social media because he was worried about finding new insulting content. This feeling of anxiety not only appears when using social media, but also continues to linger outside of online activities, indicating ongoing psychological trauma. A similar thing was also expressed by Desi Safitri who felt traumatized by the spread of her photos with very suggestive sexual comments. In addition, Yoga Kurniyawan said that after becoming a victim, he felt ashamed and afraid to meet his friends at school because he was worried that he would be talked about again. These statements show that cyberbullying not only causes social wounds, but also isolates victims psychologically and socially, in accordance with the findings of Wahyuningrum et al., (2023) who explained the serious emotional impacts experienced by victims of cyberbullying. Observations at school support these findings, where victims appear more withdrawn, reluctant to interact with peers, and show anxious expressions when using digital devices, reinforcing indications of real psychological distress. The frequency table data for psychological impacts also confirms that all respondents experienced intense shame, with most experiencing excessive anxiety and fear in socializing.

In addition to psychological impacts, decreased academic achievement is also a significant consequence of the cyberbullying experience. Most respondents admitted to experiencing a drastic decrease in concentration and motivation to learn after becoming victims. Yoga Kurniyawan expressed his inability to focus on lessons because his mind was disturbed by negative comments on social media. The same thing was felt by Liza Zakia who became lazy to study and often postponed assignments because she felt helpless in the face of pressure in cyberspace. Mahrus Rofik even felt that school was no longer a comfortable place for him, which shows how the emotional impact of cyberbullying can damage students' learning comfort. This condition is reinforced by the results of observations in class which show that victims appear lethargic, rarely ask questions, and are more alone, which directly has implications for their low academic engagement. This decline in academic performance is in line with the research of Aribowo & Bagaskara (2025), which states that cognitive dysfunction due to cyberbullying can significantly affect learning outcomes. This phenomenon emphasizes the need for integrated interventions

that not only focus on psychological aspects but also consider the recovery of motivation and academic achievement of victim students.

Another important finding is the variation in social support received by victims of cyberbullying. Of the five respondents, two students admitted to receiving adequate support from their families and schools, including assistance from Guidance and Counseling teachers and strict supervision of social media use. Desi Safitri, one of the victims, stated that her parents and BK teachers played an active role in providing assistance and limiting her access to social media, so she felt more protected. However, the other three respondents felt neglected and received less attention from their surroundings. Desi, for example, expressed her disappointment because she felt less supported by the school and family, so she was reluctant to talk further. The confession of the BK teacher at school also emphasized the difficulty of identifying cyberbullying cases because students are generally afraid or embarrassed to report them. Observations at school indicated that the capacity of BK teachers was limited due to the high workload, so intensive assistance to victims was not optimal. This inequality of social support reflects a significant gap in the detection and handling system for cyberbullying cases in the school environment, which is also reinforced by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory regarding the importance of social interaction in shaping an individual's response to stress (Angraini et al., 2024). Barriers to reporting that arise due to a culture of silence as explained by Yantika & Jamba, (2025) also worsen the condition of victims, so that efforts are needed to empower schools and families in building a more responsive environment.

This study also raises another fundamental challenge, namely the low level of digital literacy and legal awareness among students. Most victims do not have an adequate understanding of the mechanism for reporting negative content or strategies for securing digital accounts from potential further attacks. Fear of potential retaliation from the perpetrator and social constructions that portray victims as weak or overly sensitive individuals are often the main reasons, they choose to remain silent. This finding is in line with Pratama's opinion, (2024) who emphasized that norms in digital culture often shift the burden of blame to the victim, not the perpetrator. The role of social media as a catalyst for the spread of negative content further exacerbates this condition. Although several platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have introduced reporting and blocking features, their effectiveness is still questioned by respondents. Many perpetrators still do not receive strict sanctions, even their accounts remain active without significant obstacles. The criticism conveyed by Patton (2002) regarding the urgency of technology regulation based on an educational approach and the formation of a healthy digital culture is very relevant in this context (Nasoha et al., 2025).

On the legal side, although the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) has regulated criminal sanctions against perpetrators of cyberbullying, the implementation process is often hampered by the complexity of legal evidence and the identity of the perpetrators who are often disguised (anonymous). Data from interviews with guidance and counseling teachers and parents show that limited understanding of the law, coupled with fear of retaliation, are significant barriers to reporting cases to law enforcement. This strengthens the argument of Darmayanti & Wiraguna, (2025) who emphasize the importance of legal education and access to legal aid services as integral instruments in handling cases of digital violence.

Overall, the findings of this study underline the complexity of the impact of cyberbullying which includes psychological, academic, social, and legal aspects. Psychosocial disorders experienced by students cause a chain effect that reduces academic achievement and shows the need for adequate social support and a responsive assistance system. Obstacles in reporting and minimal digital and legal literacy worsen the condition of victims, requiring integrated collaboration between the government, schools, families, and the community in handling and prevention. Observations and quantitative data collected strengthen this narrative, suggesting that preventive and curative interventions should be a top priority in addressing the phenomenon of cyberbullying in school environments.

This study confirms that cyberbullying is a form of psychological violence that has a serious impact on the emotional and academic well-being of high school students. The results of in-depth interviews revealed that all respondents experienced psychological stress such as shame, excessive anxiety, and social fear, which in some cases developed into prolonged trauma. Withdrawal from the social environment and a drastic decline in academic achievement are real symptoms experienced by victims. These findings confirm that social media, beyond its function as a communication tool, has become a vulnerable space for digital violence that is difficult to detect. An important lesson that can be taken from this study is that efforts to prevent and handle cyberbullying

must be carried out systematically through increasing digital literacy, psychosocial empowerment, and more intensive cross-sector collaboration. From a theoretical perspective, these results strengthen the psychosocial framework in understanding the impact of the digital environment on adolescents, while practically encouraging the strengthening of digital-friendly school programs and safe and reliable reporting systems.

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by expanding the understanding of the dynamics and complexity of the impact of cyberbullying among students, especially through an in-depth qualitative approach. Not only does it describe various forms of digital bullying, this study also highlights the inequality of social support and weak legal and digital awareness among students, which have so far been less highlighted in similar studies. Methodologically, this study enriches scientific discourse by combining in-depth interviews, field observations, and descriptive table data as triangulation that strengthens the validity of the findings. However, this study has limitations in the number of participants and limited location coverage, which may not represent the entire dynamics of cyberbullying cases in various social and geographical contexts. Further research is needed with a wider scope, including gender variations, social backgrounds, and quantitative approaches that allow for generalization of the findings. Thus, the results of further research can be used as a basis for formulating more inclusive and adaptive policies in dealing with and preventing cyberbullying among Indonesian adolescents.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that cyberbullying is a form of psychological violence that has a serious impact on the emotional and academic well-being of high school students. The results of in-depth interviews revealed that all respondents experienced psychological stress such as shame, excessive anxiety, and social fear, which in some cases developed into prolonged trauma. Withdrawal from the social environment and a drastic decline in academic achievement are real symptoms experienced by victims. These findings confirm that social media, beyond its function as a communication tool, has become a vulnerable space for digital violence that is difficult to detect. An important lesson that can be taken from this study is that efforts to prevent and handle cyberbullying must be carried out systematically through increasing digital literacy, psychosocial empowerment, and more intensive cross-sector collaboration. From a theoretical perspective, these results strengthen the psychosocial framework in understanding the impact of the digital environment on adolescents, while practically encouraging the strengthening of digital-friendly school programs and safe and reliable reporting systems.

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