



EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF CYBERBULLYING VICTIMIZATION AMONG
YOUTHS IN MALAYSIA

WONG WOEN SHENG

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (HONS) GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of cyberbullying victimization among Malaysian youths through a qualitative phenomenological approach, guided by General Strain Theory (GST). The objectives were to examine how victims perceive the strain induced by cyberbullying, to explore its emotional, cognitive, behavioural, relational, and physical impacts, and to investigate the coping strategies they employed. Six participants aged 15 to 30, who experienced cyberbullying, participated in semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was used for data interpretation. The findings revealed that cyberbullying caused significant strain, originated from victims themselves (self-blame and guilt, unreciprocated emotional investment and helplessness), perpetrators (threats, coercion, and harassment, emotional manipulation, privacy violations, public shaming and mockery, group and repetitive aggression, and betrayal), significant others (lack of support and invalidating reactions and witnessing significant others in distress). These strain leading to intense emotional impacts such as fear and anxiety, numbness, depression and sadness, anger, guilt, helplessness, alongside cognitive impacts like hypervigilance, overthinking and negative self-appraisal, behavioural changes such as social withdrawal and isolation, online disengagement and avoidance, change in communication style and life choices, relational impacts including friendship breakdown, change in family dynamics, trust issues, and physical symptoms like sleep disturbances, appetite issues and stress-related physical symptoms. Participants utilized adaptive coping strategies, including emotional expression and release, problem-focusing coping, receiving social support and self-talk. However, maladaptive coping strategies were also observed, particularly emotional suppression, risky behaviours or attempts, self-blame and internalization, which often prolonged emotional suffering or led to physical health risks. Overall, the research reinforces the applicability of GST in understanding the complex emotional and behavioural responses to cyberbullying strain, while highlighting the urgent

need for culturally sensitive counselling interventions, resilience-building programs, and the promotion of digital literacy among Malaysian youths.

Keywords: cyberbullying, victimization, youths

Subject area: HV6250-6250.4 Victims of crimes. Victimology

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the intentional and repeated harm inflicted on individuals through the use of technology, such as mobile phones and computers. It involves using digital platforms to mock, hurt, or harm others and can occur in various contexts, including discussion forums, video or computer games, social media, or text messaging (Abramson, 2022). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying does not require the victim and perpetrator to be in the same location, region, or even country. In essence, cyberbullying transcends time, place, and space, occurring across diverse social settings (Paat & Markham, 2021).

This form of bullying manifests in several ways, such as excluding individuals from online groups or platforms, sharing offensive or harmful images or messages, and breaching someone's privacy (Willard, 2005). While some tactics employed by cyberbullies may seem familiar, we often overlook them as acts of cyberbullying. Examples include posting explicit images of someone without consent, spreading false accusations online to incite harassment, promoting self-harm or suicidal thoughts, targeting individuals for being part of the LGBTQ community, doxing over differences, and creating fake "sockpuppet" profiles to deceive or exploit others (ASPA, 2019). These behaviors are classified under broader bullying categories, including cyberstalking, defamation, impersonation, flaming, exclusion, outing and deception, and sexting (Özgür, 2020).

Cyberbullying as a Trend

As of October 2024, 5.52 billion people, accounting for 67.5% of the global population, were using the internet (Statista, 2024). Data from 2020 showed that 91% of

children aged 12 to 15 owned a smartphone, and nearly all children aged 5 to 15 (97%) accessed the internet using a device (Ofcom, 2021). This highlights that individuals are being introduced to the internet at increasingly younger ages. With the rise in internet accessibility and digital communication, young users encounter both opportunities and risks online (Livingstone et al., 2017; Macaulay et al., 2020).

In 2023, one in five internet users reported being vulnerable to cyberbullying, harassment, or abuse (Statista, 2023). According to Statista (2023), 39% of global internet users were reported to have anxious feelings and worry about being exposed to cyberbullying, cyber harassment, or cyber abuse. A survey conducted by the Market Research Institute, IPSOS and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2023) in 16 countries revealed that 67% of respondents had encountered hate speech online, signifying its widespread nature. Additionally, 69% admitted to having abused someone online (Seitz, 2024). Among students aged 13 to 17, over 55% reported experiencing cyberbullying at some point in their lives (Patchin & Hinduja, 2024).

Young adults aged 18 to 25 exhibited the highest rates of cyberbullying, both over their lifetimes and in the past month. Significant lifetime cyberbullying was also reported by older age groups: 24% of those aged 26 to 35, 13% of those aged 46 to 55, and 6.5% of individuals aged 66 and older (Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, a 2023 survey found that 28.6% of girls and 24.2% of boys had experienced cyberbullying in the preceding 30 days (Patchin & Hinduja, 2024). These findings demonstrate that cyberbullying affects individuals across different countries, age groups, and genders.

Impacts of Cyberbullying Victimization

Victims of cyberbullying often experience a range of negative emotional and behavioral outcomes, including depression (Maurya et al., 2022), loneliness (Varghese & Pistole, 2017), low self-esteem (Agustiniingsih et al., 2024), antisocial behavior (Wolke et al., 2017), and, in severe cases, suicidal thoughts or attempts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that 13.9% of adolescents in the United States have experienced cyberbullying, and 13.6% have seriously attempted suicide, highlighting the growing prevalence of these issues among adolescents (Schonfeld et al., 2023). Adolescents who have been cyberbullying victims are 2.5 times more likely to experience suicidal thoughts compared to their non-victimized peers (Maurya et al., 2022). Additionally, 16.62% of men and 32.95% of women reported depressive symptoms resulting from cyberbullying (Maurya et al., 2022). A meta-analysis of 57 studies involving 105,440 participants from 17 countries confirmed a strong positive association between cyberbullying victimization and depression (Hu et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying also correlates with risky behaviors. Adolescents with any history of cyberbullying involvement—including witnessing it—were more likely to engage in substance use (alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and other drugs) within six months, compared to those without such experiences (Yoon et al., 2019). Over 60% of children who experienced cyberbullying reported it significantly impacted their academic performance and sense of safety at school, with 10% admitting they had skipped school at least once in the past year due to cyberbullying (Cyberbullying Research Centre, 2023). Victims are also more likely to associate with deviant peers and are at a heightened risk of substance abuse, such as drinking alcohol (Chen et al., 2020). Interestingly, research shows that cyberbullying victimization can be a strong predictor of perpetration. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies suggest that victims of cyberbullying often become offenders themselves, perpetuating a cycle of abuse.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the ways in which victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying.
2. To explore the impacts of cyberbullying on victims.
3. To investigate the coping strategies employed by cyberbullying victims in response to the strain they experienced.

Research Questions

1. How do victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying?
2. What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?
3. What coping strategies do victims of cyberbullying employed in response to the strain they experienced?

Problem Statements

High Prevalence of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Globally, Malaysia is ranked second in Asia for cyberbullying issues and sixth among 28 countries worldwide. One in four Malaysian parents reported that their child had been a victim of cyberbullying (IPSOS, 2018). Additionally, over half of Malaysian adolescents who use Social Networking Services (SNS) have experienced victimization both offline and online, according to Marret and Choo (2017). In 2019, three out of ten young Malaysians report having experienced cyberbullying, with youths making up the largest victim group in cyberbullying instances in Malaysia, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). These can help to explain the Cybersecurity Malaysia 2020 incident figures, which indicate that one of the top five cyberthreats to Malaysians is cyberbullying.

In fact, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported receiving 3,199 complaints related to cyberbullying in 2023, though the actual number of unreported victims who suffer in silence is likely much higher (theSun, 2024). Alarming, from January to November 1, 2024, MCMC recorded 8,399 complaints about cyberbullying, averaging 27 cases per day (theSun, 2024). This reflects a significant rise in incidents within just one year. One of the most prevalent types of harassment that young people experience is cyberbullying, which may negatively impact their relationships, education, and mental health (MCMC, 2024). Like in other parts of the world, cyberbullying is becoming more and more common in Malaysia, particularly among students attending higher education institutions. According to the current study, 60% of college and university students reported experiencing cyberbullying, which is a very high prevalence rate (Lai et al., 2017).

It is reported that nearly 28% of Malaysian adolescents have experienced some form of online bullying with rates higher among those engaged in multiple social media platforms

(Lee et al., 2023). Furthermore, cultural nuances in Malaysia, such as the emphasis on community harmony and saving face often stigmatize victims and discourage them from reporting the bullying incidents (Ibrahim & Vi, 2021). As a result, many cases of cyberbullying remain hidden and unaddressed, perpetuating the issue in silence.

Negative Impacts of Cyberbullying in Malaysia

A study conducted by the Malaysian Mental Health Association revealed that at least 20% of youth suicides in recent years were linked to cyberbullying (Kee et al., 2024). According to Fadhli et al. (2022), 17.1% of adolescents reported experiencing suicidal behaviour, with 11.9% having suicidal thoughts, 10.2% creating a suicide plan, and 8.4% attempting suicide. These findings highlight the significant role of cyberbullying victimization as a key risk factor for suicidal tendencies among young people. Additionally, psychological distress was found to have a strong relationship with cyberbullying victimization, acting both as a cause and an effect of the experience among young adults in Malaysia (Samsudin et al., 2023).

Research by Hu et al. (2021) further indicated that the risk of depression following cyberbullying increases with age, particularly among individuals between the ages of 10 and 24, with college students being the most severely affected. According to Teh and Amat (2024), Cybersecurity Malaysia (2020) reported that over 53% of young Malaysians are at risk of becoming cyberbullies, while around 25% have been victims of online bullying. Furthermore, more than 44% of young Malaysians experienced significant levels of cyber-related anxiety, depression, and stress due to their involvement in cyberbullying. Among those who were cyberbullying victims, 72.2% reported experiencing high levels of anxiety, 68.1% suffered from elevated depression, and 75.2% exhibited high stress levels.

According to Lee et al. (2023), a study on university students in Malaysia found that cyberbullying victimization was linked to a doubled likelihood of experiencing depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. Moreover, social media addiction was positively correlated with an increased risk of cyberbullying victimization. Additionally, substance abuse, such as cigarette, drug, and alcohol use, has been identified as a form of negative coping behaviour associated with cyberbullying victimization (Samsudin et al., 2023).

Cases of Cyberbullying in Malaysia

Recently, a tragic cyberbullying case has stirred significant outrage among Malaysians. On July 5, social media influencer Ms. Rajeswary Appahu, known to her followers as Esha, was found dead in her home from suicide, just one day after filing a police report in Kuala Lumpur. In her report, she expressed fears of being raped and murdered (Channel News Asia, 2024). According to local news, Ms. Rajeswary accused two individuals of subjecting her to relentless harassment on TikTok, even naming them in her police complaint. She also revealed that someone had used threats and abusive language during a TikTok "live session" to torment her.

Tragically, her case is not an isolated incident; a similar situation occurred just two years earlier. In 2022, Shashikala Nadarajah, a 44-year-old mother of three, reportedly took her own life after experiencing cyberbullying on TikTok. As reported by Sinar Daily (2022), Shashikala's TikTok account, which showcased her personal life and hobbies, became a target for malicious individuals who inundated her posts with hateful comments. What should have been a space for self-expression quickly turned into a battleground of cruel insults, particularly focused on her appearance and her collection of handbags. Both of these cases highlight the growing and distressing issue of cyberbullying in Malaysia, revealing its devastating impact on the lives of victims.

Limited Research on Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

There is a noticeable gap in research on cyberbullying victimization among university students in Malaysia. One major limitation lies in the research design of existing studies on cyberbullying victimization among youth in the country. While there is a growing body of quantitative research (Fadhli et al., 2022; Ooi et al., 2022; Samsudin et al., 2023; Sivabalan et al., 2020), there is a notable lack of qualitative studies in this area. Most of the quantitative studies rely on large sample sizes, but they fail to delve deeply into the lived experiences of victims or capture the complexities of cyberbullying victimization. As a result, there is a scarcity of in-depth data on how young people in Malaysia are affected by cyberbullying.

Another significant research gap is the limited understanding of cyberbullying victimization itself. While there has been considerable focus on cyberbullying perpetration (Sivabalan et al., 2020; Balakrishnan & Norman, 2020; Shaikh et al., 2021; Tazilah et al., 2022), cyberbullying victimization is rarely the primary focus of research. By concentrating mainly on perpetrators, much of the emotional impact, coping mechanisms, and personal experiences of victims are overlooked. This leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the full scope of the cyberbullying phenomenon, particularly from the victim's perspective.

Significance of the Study

Practical Significance

This research not only has the potential to enrich the existing academic discourse in the field of counselling but also provides valuable practical insights that can guide the improvement of counselling services in Malaysia. The Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia (LKM) can potentially be a party that benefits from the study of our research. The vision of LKM is to develop counselling services into a source of potential for the formation of a thriving Malaysian society. According to a study by Arifin (2022), counselling services in Malaysia

remain inadequate, especially for university students, largely due to a lack of trust in the available services. Strengthening the competencies of counsellors is essential to rebuilding public trust and confidence in counselling. Our research can provide crucial insights into the phenomenon of cyberbullying victimization, a prevalent and complex issue in Malaysia today. These findings can guide LKM's efforts to enhance counselling services, as understanding cyberbullying better will aid in developing new approaches to support victims. By improving counsellor competencies in this area, the study can ultimately help shift public attitudes toward counselling services, contributing to LKM's vision of fostering a more thriving and resilient society.

Furthermore, this research can enhance counsellors' artificial intelligence (AI) literacy in Malaysia by providing a deeper understanding of the impact of cyberbullying victimization on youths. AI literacy refers to understanding how AI influences our daily lives (Ghani et al., 2024). It is essential for individuals to grasp the effects and mechanisms of AI, particularly as it becomes more involved in the creation, dissemination, and consumption of media. This includes understanding the ethical implications of AI's role in shaping information. Additionally, Malaysia's "AI untuk Rakyat" initiative is working to bridge the AI literacy gap by introducing AI concepts to people from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and regions. The initiative aims to foster an innovative and inclusive society, addressing digital literacy gaps and promoting digital inclusiveness. Our research can provide valuable insights on cyberbullying victimization, which can assist counsellors in promoting AI literacy, further supporting the objectives of the "AI untuk Rakyat" initiative and helping Malaysia move closer to achieving its vision for a digitally inclusive society.

Theoretical Significance

There is a lack of theoretical frameworks that fully explain how cyberbullying victimization leads to negative outcomes for the victims. As a result, the present study aims to provide valuable insights into how cyberbullying impacts victims by applying a theoretical framework. While there is no widely accepted, comprehensive theoretical model for understanding cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020), many theories focus primarily on cyberbullying perpetration. These include the Barlett and Gentile Cyberbullying Model (Barlett, 2017), Social Learning Theory (Shadmanfaat et al., 2018), and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2021). In our research, we have chosen to apply General Strain Theory (GST) as a framework to explain cyberbullying victimization.

According to General Strain Theory (GST), a variety of strains or stressful experiences can lead to negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment, depression, and anger, which may, in turn, increase the likelihood of crime or delinquent behaviours (Agnew, 1992). These negative emotions generate a need for coping, and crime or delinquency often serve as potential coping strategies. Agnew (1992) posited that being a victim of bullying is one such strain that can evoke these harmful emotional responses. By applying GST, this research seeks to contribute to the theoretical understanding of cyberbullying victimization among youths in Malaysia, offering insights into how these strains can lead to emotional and behavioural consequences.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its potential to expand the application of GST in the context of cyberbullying. While GST has been used to explore a range of stressors leading to criminal behaviour, its application to cyberbullying victimization remains under-explored. By using GST, this study can shed light on how cyberbullying, as a form of strain, triggers negative emotions in victims, which may lead to a range of psychological and behavioural responses. This theoretical approach helps to frame cyberbullying victimization

not merely as an isolated event but as a complex process that contributes to broader emotional and psychological struggles. Moreover, the findings from this study could provide a deeper understanding of the coping mechanisms employed by victims, revealing whether they adopt maladaptive responses, such as aggression or withdrawal, as a result of the strain caused by cyberbullying. In doing so, this research contributes not only to the understanding of cyberbullying's impacts on youth in Malaysia but also enriches the theoretical body of knowledge surrounding the role of strain in mental health and behaviour.

Research Significance

Given the limited research on cyberbullying victimization among youths in Malaysia, this study offers a new direction for future investigations in this critical area. As cyberbullying continues to rise globally and within Malaysia, our research provides valuable in-depth data and insights into the experiences of cyberbullying victims among Malaysian youths. This study lays a foundation for future research that could explore the issue from different methodological perspectives. For example, future quantitative studies could expand the sample size to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying. By applying the insights gained from this research, future studies can assess the effectiveness of interventions and strategies, providing a clearer picture of how cyberbullying affects a larger, more diverse group of individuals.

Additionally, in the context of Malaysia, where cyberbullying is becoming an increasingly urgent concern researchers should consider expanding the scope of future studies to include different age groups, such as children, adolescents, and even the elderly, who may also be affected by cyberbullying in different ways. This would contribute to the knowledge base and enhance counselling practices across various life stages, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the unique needs of each group.

Overall, the research significance of this study lies in its potential to fill an important gap in understanding cyberbullying victimization among Malaysian youths. By providing detailed, culturally relevant insights, this study offers a starting point for future research that could deepen our understanding of the issue and inform practices aimed at reducing the impact of cyberbullying in Malaysia and beyond.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying Victimization and Strain

Strain from cyberbullying is primarily emotional and behavioural in nature. Emotionally, victims often experience heightened negative states such as fear, self-blame, and depression. For instance, Lee et al. (2023) found that cyberbullying victimization elevated depressive symptoms, while Stubbs-Richardson and May (2021) highlighted that anticipated strain or fear of victimization impacts verbal and cyber victimization. Behaviourally, the strain experienced by victims often results in deviant or maladaptive outcomes. Al-Badayneh et al. (2022) revealed that strain from cyberbullying victimization significantly predicted delinquency among high school students, with their logistic regression model achieving a high accuracy rate of 93.3%.

Similarly, Li and Peng (2022) discussed how strain from cyberbullying not only stems from victimization but also predicts future perpetration, emphasizing its cyclical nature. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2020) underscored the severe psychological impacts, such as suicidal ideation among adolescents, highlighting the unique features of cyberbullying— anonymity, ubiquitousness, and multiformity—as exacerbating factors of strain. Wood Jr. and Graham (2018) extend this by linking strain to deviant health risk behaviours as coping mechanisms, suggesting that factors like peer influence and low self-control may exacerbate these behaviours.

Lee et al. (2021) affirm that victimization, coupled with association with cyberbullying peers, intensifies the likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying, demonstrating the applicability of GST and social learning theories to this domain. Collectively, these findings highlight how cyberbullying victimization generates emotional and behavioural strain, perpetuating a cycle of negative outcomes. Also, these studies affirm that

cyberbullying victimization generates substantial strain, which can manifest in emotional distress, maladaptive coping, or even deviant behaviours.

The studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and strain, yet they exhibit some limitations. First, while the findings are robust in their quantitative analysis, they often lack a deeper exploration of individual experiences and contextual nuances, which qualitative methods could provide. For example, while Al-Badayneh et al. (2022) achieve high predictive accuracy, the reliance on logistic regression limits the comprehension of how strain evolves over time. Thus, it leads to a lack of comprehensive understanding on how the cyberbullying victims perceived the strain after experiencing cyberbullying victimization.

Furthermore, cultural contexts are underexplored, as most studies, like Li and Peng (2022) and Kim et al. (2020), focus on specific regions such as China or South Korea, making it difficult to generalize findings to other populations, including Malaysia. Another critique lies in the overemphasis on negative outcomes, such as delinquency and suicidal ideation, while neglecting resilience factors or protective mechanisms that some victims may employ. Lastly, while anonymity and other distinctive features of cyberbullying are highlighted, more emphasis could be placed on how these factors interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities to exacerbate strain. Overall, while the studies significantly advance our understanding of cyberbullying and strain, they would benefit from greater diversity in research methods, cultural perspectives, and focus on coping mechanisms or strategies.

Cyberbullying Victimization and Negative Impacts

The findings on cyberbullying victimization and its negative impacts reveal a broad spectrum of detrimental outcomes affecting victims' emotional, social, behavioural, and psychological well-being. Emotional impacts are among the most significant consequences,

with studies like Varela et al. (2022), Wang (2021), and Geng et al. (2021) emphasizing heightened levels of depression, social anxiety, and a diminished sense of life's meaning among victims. Victims frequently report feelings of loneliness and isolation (Cañas et al., 2020; Varela et al., 2022), compounded by failed attempts to alleviate these emotions through increased reliance on technology, which ironically exacerbates their isolation.

Psychological impacts are pervasive. De Pasquale et al. (2021) found that victims experience higher levels of aggression, confusion, and depressive symptoms, reflecting significant emotional strain. Similarly, Lee and Chun (2020) identified internalized issues like trauma, emotional distress, and psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., hair loss), which are particularly pronounced among male victims. Behavioural outcomes also emerge prominently; studies such as Khine et al. (2020) document unhealthy coping mechanisms, including substance use like smoking, betel chewing, and alcohol consumption, as victims attempt to manage their distress.

Socially, cyberbullying victims face challenges in their peer relationships and school environments. Lee and Chun (2020) highlighted issues such as conflicts with friends, school absenteeism, and breakdowns in social relationships. Victims also struggle with online problems, including secondary victimization through the leaking of personal information, blackmail, or exposure to public humiliation, which further deepens their emotional trauma.

Coping strategies vary, with some victims seeking social support, as documented by Lee and Chun (2020), who found that male students valued professional support, such as from teachers or law enforcement, over parental or peer support. Despite the potential effectiveness of seeking support, studies like Wang (2021) and Geng et al. (2021) caution that many victims may adopt maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance or passive responses, which fail to mitigate the negative impacts of cyberbullying effectively.

While Lee and Chun (2020) emphasize the importance of social support, the studies lack sufficient exploration of cultural differences in how social support systems operate. For instance, victims in Malaysian cultures may rely more heavily on family than their counterparts in Western cultures, which warrants deeper investigation. Moreover, some studies, such as Khine et al. (2020), overemphasize behavioural outcomes like substance abuse without delving into the underlying psychological mechanisms, such as low self-esteem or chronic trauma, which may drive these behaviours.

The research methodologies employed in the reviewed studies are predominantly quantitative, offering valuable insights into the widespread patterns of cyberbullying victimization and its impacts. However, a purely quantitative approach has its limitations, especially when it comes to understanding the personal, subjective experiences of victims. For example, while studies like those by De Pasquale et al. (2021) and Khine et al. (2020) highlight the links between cyberbullying and negative psychological impacts and mental health outcomes, they do so in a generalized manner. Quantitative data can show that there is a significant relationship between cyberbullying victimization and depression or substance abuse, but it cannot fully capture the emotional depth of these experiences. The predominance of quantitative research methods in the other studies, while advantageous for statistical rigor and generalizability, fails to capture the depth and complexity of victims' lived experiences. It remains unclear how victims feel about their experiences, how they perceive the coping strategies they employ, and the personal significance of these events in their lives. These are important dimensions that would require qualitative methods to explore in greater detail.

Among the studies synthesized, only Lee and Chun (2020) utilized a qualitative research design, specifically concept mapping, to explore the perceived impacts of

cyberbullying victimization. However, the sample representation in terms of gender and age is uneven. Studies like Lee and Chun (2020) focus exclusively on male adolescents, overlooking the unique experiences of female victims or other gender groups. This creates a gap in understanding the diverse impacts of cyberbullying across populations.

Cyberbullying Victimization and Coping Strategies

The findings from various studies provide a comprehensive view of the coping strategies employed by cyberbullying victims and how these strategies are linked to their experiences of victimization. These studies reveal that victims often adopt a range of strategies, some of which are short-term solutions, while others might have long-term implications for their mental health and well-being.

Byrne (2021) highlighted that many victims of cyberbullying engage in immediate, pseudo-anonymous coping strategies such as blocking the bully, withholding comments, or self-censoring. This tendency to choose such strategies may stem from the nature of online interactions, where the bully often operates under the veil of anonymity. While these strategies provide a sense of temporary relief by preventing direct contact with the bully, they may not resolve the underlying issue or address the emotional toll that the bullying inflicts. This reflects a broader issue in cyberbullying coping strategies: many victims are unable to engage in problem-based strategies because the anonymous nature of online bullying makes it difficult to confront or challenge the bully directly.

Chen & Zhu (2022) further confirm this trend, revealing that many victims of cyberbullying are more likely to engage in inaction or individual coping mechanisms rather than seek help from others. A significant number of victims refrain from taking action or seeking external support, which may stem from feelings of helplessness, shame, or fear of being further victimized. Similarly, Ngo et al. (2021) found that victims frequently chose not

to share their experiences with adults, particularly parents or teachers, due to fears that these adults would not understand or be able to intervene effectively. These findings point to a critical gap in support systems, as victims often prefer to solve the problem themselves rather than reach out to adults, thereby prolonging their distress and leaving them without appropriate intervention.

Emotion-focused coping strategies, such as ignoring the bullying or distancing oneself from the source of distress, were also prevalent among victims. Varela et al. (2022) highlighted that emotion-focused coping strategies can have mixed results, depending on how they are implemented. In some cases, these strategies can provide short-term relief and emotional distancing from the bullying; however, when used excessively, they may prevent victims from addressing the underlying emotional and psychological issues caused by the bullying. This suggests that emotion-focused coping strategies can be double-edged swords. While they may offer a temporary escape, they do not necessarily promote emotional growth or resilience. McLoughlin (2021) also found that emotion-focused coping, especially when it involves avoidance or ignoring the issue, is linked to poorer long-term mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. These findings underscore the need for interventions that encourage more active coping strategies, where victims not only acknowledge the bullying but also seek constructive solutions.

In contrast, problem-focused coping strategies, such as directly confronting the bully or seeking support from trusted adults, are generally considered more adaptive and linked to better mental health outcomes. However, research by Chi et al. (2020) and Siah et al. (2022) indicates that while friends are often the primary source of support for victims, there is a reluctance to involve authority figures like teachers or parents. This reluctance to seek formal support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and leave victims without the resources needed to

effectively deal with the bullying. Chi et al. (2020) found that students were more likely to confide in their friends, yet very few chose to approach teachers. This highlights a critical area for intervention: fostering environments where adolescents feel more comfortable discussing their experiences with trusted adults, including teachers and parents, who can provide guidance and support. Social support has been found to buffer the negative mental health impacts of cyberbullying, and these results further emphasize the importance of encouraging victims to seek help from various sources.

The study by Lee et al. (2024), an exploratory qualitative study focused on women with heavy social media use, provides a valuable contribution to understanding coping strategies in the context of cyberbullying. Their findings align with existing literature on coping strategies, categorizing them into problem-focused, emotion-focused, and social coping. This study is particularly useful because it highlights the emotional and psychological challenges faced by victims, such as insecurity, fear, and self-doubt, and how these feelings lead victims to adopt strategies like isolation or limiting their online interactions. However, while this study contributes to our understanding of coping strategies, it has some limitations. The sample population, consisting of women with heavy social media use, limits the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups, such as men, or those with less engagement with social media platforms.

While the findings of the studies reviewed provide valuable insights, several critiques arise, particularly regarding the research methodology. One major concern is the limited focus on qualitative research, as only Lee et al. (2024) utilized an in-depth qualitative approach to explore coping strategies. Qualitative research, while rich in detail, often lacks the generalizability of quantitative studies. Lee et al.'s study, for example, presents an in-depth exploration of coping strategies among women with heavy social media use, but its

findings may not be applicable to other groups, such as men or those with different levels of social media engagement. This limitation raises questions about the broader applicability of the study's findings to diverse populations.

Furthermore, many of the studies reviewed did not address the role of cultural or contextual factors in shaping coping strategies. Victims from different cultural backgrounds or with different socioeconomic statuses may adopt varying coping strategies based on their unique experiences and access to resources. Incorporating cultural considerations into research on coping strategies could help to identify more tailored and effective interventions for cyberbullying victims across different communities.

Theoretical Framework

General Strain Theory

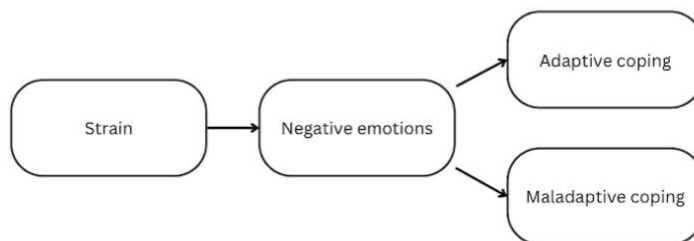


Figure 1: General Strain Theory (Theoretical Framework)

Strain

According to Agnew (1992), strain is defined as “relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated.” However, the concept of strain is interpreted differently by researchers. Some define it as an objective event or condition, such as experiencing physical abuse or receiving poor grades at school. Others view it as the individual’s evaluation of an event or condition, like whether juveniles feel satisfied with how their parents or teachers treat them. Still, others focus on the emotional response to an event or condition, such as feelings of anger or frustration stemming from mistreatment. To provide a clearer understanding of strain, distinct definitions are proposed.

Objective strains refer to events or conditions that are generally disliked by most members of a particular group (Brezina, 2017). When we say an individual is experiencing objective strain, it implies they are undergoing an event or condition that is typically regarded as unpleasant by their group. Certain events and conditions, such as physical assault or

inadequate access to food and shelter, are universally disliked across groups. However, the perception of other events and conditions may vary depending on group characteristics like age or gender (Broidy and Agnew, 1997).

According to Brezina (2017), subjective strains, on the other hand, pertain to events or conditions that are personally disliked by the individuals experiencing them. In this context, when someone is said to be experiencing subjective strain, it indicates that they find a particular event or condition personally unpleasant. A notable finding in stress research is that individuals often differ in their subjective assessment of the same objective strain. For instance, people may vary in how they perceive objective strains such as divorce or the loss of a loved one. These subjective evaluations are influenced by a variety of factors, including individual traits such as irritability, personal and social resources such as self-esteem, social support, and self-efficacy, personal goals, values, identities, and broader life circumstances.

Types of Strain

According to Agnew (1992), General Strain Theory identifies three primary types of strain, with the first being the frustration experienced when individuals are unable to attain their desired goals, often termed "goal blockage." While traditional strain theories also highlighted goal blockage, they primarily focused on a single aspect: the gap between aspirations and expectations. For example, strain occurs when individuals aspire to achieve financial success but perceive it as unattainable, seeing their goals as beyond reach. Agnew (1992), however, expands this perspective by emphasizing that other forms of goal blockage may have an even stronger connection to criminal behaviour and delinquency. Aspirations often represent idealistic or utopian goals, and their unfulfillment may not always be a significant source of strain or frustration. GST acknowledges that goal blockage can also stem from failing to achieve expected outcomes, such as not receiving an anticipated income,

or failing to attain fair and just outcomes, such as being denied a deserved reward. These latter forms of goal blockage are more likely to evoke feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction, which may, in turn, lead to negative outcomes.

The second type of strain arises from the presence of noxious or negatively valued stimuli. This includes situations where individuals are subjected to undesirable circumstances or negative treatment from others. Examples of such strain include being harassed or bullied by peers, experiencing strained relationships with parents or teachers, or being a victim of criminal acts. These adverse experiences create a sense of distress that can significantly impact an individual's emotional well-being.

The third type of strain involves the loss of positively valued stimuli, which refers to the loss of something meaningful or cherished. This type of strain encompasses a variety of distressing events, such as the theft of a valued possession, the end of a romantic relationship, or the withdrawal of parental affection. The loss of these valued stimuli often results in feelings of grief and a sense of personal deprivation, which can influence behaviour in profound ways.

Strain and Negative Emotions

General Strain Theory (GST) places particular emphasis on the negative emotion of anger, which is believed to play a central role in energizing individuals toward action, diminishing their concern for the consequences of their behaviour, and fuelling a desire for revenge. According to Agnew (1995b), researchers should explore both “long-term or chronic anger” (trait anger) and “the frequency of angry episodes” (state anger) to fully understand the dynamics of anger in the context of strain. State anger refers to a temporary emotional reaction triggered by specific frustrating or irritating situations. In contrast, trait anger is a personality characteristic that predisposes individuals to perceive a broad range of

situations as annoying or frustrating and to respond with significant increases in state anger. Consequently, individuals with high levels of trait anger are more likely to experience prolonged and intense episodes of state anger in response to strain compared to those with lower levels of trait anger. This heightened emotional reactivity makes them more vulnerable to the adverse effects of strain.

While Agnew (1992) identifies anger as the “most critical emotional reaction” in the context of General Strain Theory, he also acknowledges the significance of other negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety. Agnew (1992) suggests that various negative emotions can lead to distinct types of criminal behaviour. For instance, depression, an inwardly directed emotion, may be more likely to result in internalized criminal acts such as substance abuse. On the other hand, anger, an outwardly directed emotion, is more closely associated with externalized behaviours, such as acts of aggression or violence. This distinction highlights the nuanced ways in which different emotional responses to strain can shape behavioural outcomes.

Strain and Coping Strategies

Agnew (1992) argued that individuals adapt to strain differently due to variations in their coping strategies. When the negative emotions stemming from strain trigger coping mechanisms—whether cognitive, emotional, or behavioural—individuals may potentially steer themselves away from maladaptive or harmful pathways (Agnew, 2001; Brezina, 1996; Broidy, 2001). However, these coping strategies can manifest in both adaptive and maladaptive ways.

Cognitive coping involves minimizing or denying the impact of negative emotions. For example, an individual might use phrases like, “It doesn’t matter” or “I’m better off

anyway” as a way to rationalize their circumstances and reduce emotional distress (Agnew, 1992).

Behavioural coping occurs when an individual takes direct action to address the root cause of their negative emotions. For instance, someone in an unhappy marriage might seek a divorce as a proactive solution. However, behavioural coping can also take a criminal turn if individuals resort to unlawful means to resolve their problems. Using the same example, an individual might choose to commit murder rather than pursue divorce as a way to escape the strain.

Emotional coping, on the other hand, focuses on alleviating the negative emotions themselves without addressing or denying their cause. Common examples include engaging in exercise, socializing with friends, or indulging in comfort food to feel better. Yet, emotional coping can also lead to criminal behaviour, such as illicit drug use or acts of domestic violence, as individuals seek unhealthy ways to numb their emotions.

These distinctions highlight how coping strategies can either mitigate or exacerbate the effects of strain, ultimately influencing the individual’s response and behaviour.

Strain and Maladaptive Coping

According to the foundational statement of General Strain Theory (GST) by Agnew (1992), the likelihood of a deviant response to strain is influenced by several factors. These include an individual’s coping skills and resources, access to social support, relationships with delinquent peers, levels of social control, beliefs about crime, and personality traits such as self-control. However, research on how these factors condition responses to strain has yielded mixed findings. Studies have suggested that associations with delinquent peers, deviant beliefs, low self-control, and other factors can increase the probability that strain will

lead to maladaptive outcomes (Agnew & White, 1992; Keith, 2014; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000).

Agnew (1992) further hypothesizes that outer-directed emotions, such as anger, are more likely to result in outer-directed deviance such as aggression than inner-directed deviance such as drug use. However, he emphasizes that outer-directed emotions are not a necessary precondition for outer-directed deviance. For example, individuals who attribute their adversity to others are more likely to experience anger, which may lead to acts of aggression toward others. Even so, these individuals might still turn to drug use to alleviate their anger.

Conversely, individuals who experience inner-directed emotions, such as depression, are more prone to self-directed deviance, such as substance abuse, as they are more likely to blame themselves for their problems. Nevertheless, depressive feelings can still lead to interpersonal conflicts, such as arguments or fights. While opposite-directed effects (the influence of anger on drug use or depression on aggression) are possible, Agnew argues that same-directed effects (anger leading to aggression or depression leading to drug use) are generally stronger. This suggests that the nature of the emotion plays a significant role in shaping the type of maladaptive coping behaviour individuals might engage in when responding to strain.

Conceptual Framework

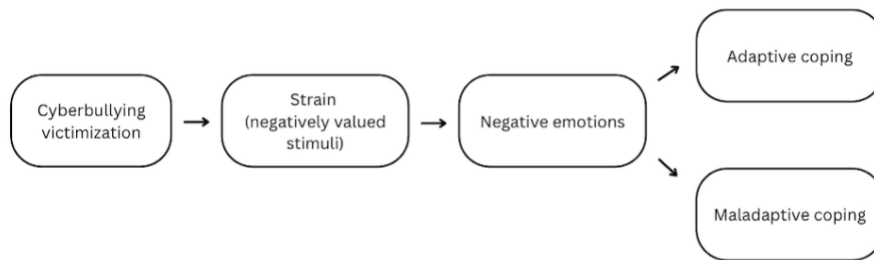


Figure 2: General Strain Theory (Conceptual Framework)

Cyberbullying Victimization and Strain

Cyberbullying victimization can potentially be a source leading to strain caused by negatively valued stimuli. According to Agnew (1992), the strain caused by presentation of noxious or negatively valued stimuli includes experiences in which the individual is exposed to undesirable circumstances or is the recipient of negative treatment by others, such as harassment and bullying from others, negative relations with others, or victimization.

Cyberbullying victimization, which is defined as repeatedly made fun of, hurt, or causing harm by someone else via online, is likely to present a negatively valued stimuli to the victims of cyberbullying. Strain arises from exposure to negatively valued stimuli, such as online harassment, social exclusion, threats, or public shaming. This makes it a particularly severe form of strain, amplifying its potential impact on emotional and behavioural responses. The General Strain Theory posits that such strains provoke intense negative emotions, which, if not managed appropriately, can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms and undesirable outcomes.

Cyberbullying Victimization and Negative Emotion

The emotional response to cyberbullying victimization plays a critical role in shaping how individuals deal with strain. Victims often experience a wide range of negative emotions, including depression (Maurya et al., 2022), anger (Dou et al., 2020), loneliness (Varghese & Pistole, 2017), low self-esteem (Tansear et al., 2024). GST highlights that these emotions are not only outcomes of strain but also mediators that influence the likelihood of engaging in specific coping behaviours.

Anger, for example, may lead to aggressive behaviours (Al-Badayneh et al., 2023), while anxiety might result in withdrawal or avoidance behaviours (Keith, 2018).

Understanding these emotional dynamics is crucial for addressing the psychological toll of cyberbullying and guiding victims toward constructive coping strategies. Therefore, the negative emotions caused by the strain was essential to be discussed and evaluated in our research study.

Cyberbullying Victimization and Adaptive Coping

When individuals experience cyberbullying victimization, adaptive coping strategies are essential for managing the strain and mitigating its emotional and psychological effects in an adaptive way. According to Agnew (1992), these strategies can be categorized into cognitive coping, behavioural coping, and emotional coping, each addressing different dimensions of the individual's response to the strain. Together, these strategies form a holistic approach to positive coping, reducing the negative impact of cyberbullying and promoting recovery. In this research study, the adaptive coping of cyberbullying victims will be explored and how the adaptive coping can help in minimizing the negative emotions of cyberbullying strain will be investigated.

Cyberbullying Victimization and Maladaptive Coping

On the other hand, some victims may adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms, which are inappropriate and potentially harmful responses to strain. GST specifies conditions that are said to increase the likelihood of maladaptive coping, including a lack of coping skills, a lack of conventional social support, few opportunities for conventional coping, ample opportunities for criminal coping, the existence of low social control, and a strong predisposition for crime. These maladaptive mechanisms include suicidal attempts, substance abuse, unsafe sexual, avoidance and weapon carrying behaviours (Sconfeld et al., 2023; Graham & Wood, 2018; Keith, 2017).

In many studies, social support is widely recognized and categorized as a adaptive and adaptive coping strategy (Tonsing et al., 2020; Huey & Ferguson, 2020; Rudolph et al., 2021). According to Huey and Ferguson (2020), individuals facing various life stressors and negative emotions often adopt adaptive coping behaviours, such as seeking social support, which not only provide immediate emotional relief but also enhance their long-term well-being and resilience to future stressors. On the other hand, maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse and smoking, are often linked to a deficiency in adaptive coping skills when individuals encounter significant stressors and negative emotions (Cerea et al., 2017; Nohlert et al., 2018).

Additionally, associations with deviant peers, particularly those involved in substance use, have been shown to play a significant role in fostering maladaptive coping behaviours like drug and alcohol abuse. Cognitive patterns, such as belief in crime, can also perpetuate maladaptive behaviours. For instance, the criminal thinking style known as ‘mollification,’ which involves shifting blame onto others, closely mirrors the coping strategy of ‘blaming others’ (Avila, 2021). Similarly, ‘discontinuity,’ characterized by a lack of commitment to goals or responsibilities, aligns with the coping strategy of ‘behavioural disengagement’.

Personality traits have also been identified as contributing factors to maladaptive coping. According to Sica et al. (2021), traits such as antagonism, detachment, disinhibition, negative affectivity, and psychoticism can predispose individuals to engage in ineffective or harmful coping strategies.

Such responses often create a cycle of strain and maladaptation, worsening the victim's situation and increasing their vulnerability to further victimization. In this research study, the maladaptive coping of cyberbullying victims will be explored and how the maladaptive coping being developed from negative emotions of cyberbullying strain will be investigated.

In summary, this conceptual framework integrates the core principles of General Strain Theory to explain how cyberbullying victimization operates as a source of strain, leading to negative emotions and influencing coping mechanisms. By examining the interplay between strain, emotions, and coping mechanisms, the framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying cyberbullying victimization and its outcomes. By utilizing a phenomenology approach, this research study aims to explore how victims of cyberbullying perceived experience strain due to the bullying, understand the impacts of cyberbullying on victims, and investigate the coping mechanisms employed by cyberbullying victims in response to the strain they experienced.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a methodological approach to scientific inquiry that prioritizes the depth and richness of context and individual voices in unravelling social phenomena. This methodology, rooted in constructivist or interpretive paradigms (Lim, 2023), seeks to illuminate the “what,” “why,” “when,” “where,” “who,” and “how” (or the “5W1H”) of social behaviours and interactions. Rather than focusing solely on numerical measurements, qualitative research delves into the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings individuals ascribe to their social realities. With its embrace of openness, it employs versatile methods such as open-ended questioning, in-depth and focus group interviews, and participant observation, enabling a holistic exploration of the phenomena under study.

This approach offers a unique lens to understand young people’s inner worlds, capturing their thoughts, emotions, and self-perceptions. It allows for the articulation of subjective definitions, meanings, and experiences of cyberbullying to take center stage (Barter & Renold, 2000; Mishna, 2004). According to Creswell (2022), qualitative research is characterized by a focus on understanding the meanings that participants ascribe to a problem or issue, rather than imposing the researcher’s own interpretations or relying solely on perspectives from existing literature.

Qualitative researchers strive to create a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the issue under study. This involves exploring diverse viewpoints, identifying the various factors at play, and capturing the broader context that emerges from the data (Creswell, 2024). The research process is inherently flexible and evolving, meaning that the initial research plan is not rigidly defined and may adapt as the researcher enters the field and

begins collecting data. At its core, qualitative research seeks to gain insights directly from participants, ensuring the study is shaped by their experiences and perspectives.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research design, strives to uncover the core nature of lived experiences by examining them through the lens of individual perspectives (Lim, 2024). Its greatest strength lies in its dedication to understanding the intricate nuances of human experience, providing an intimate immersion into personal viewpoints. This enables researchers to capture the subtleties of subjective experiences that might elude quantitative approaches. Similarly, Creswell (2022) explains that phenomenological research is an approach rooted in philosophy and psychology, where the researcher explores and conveys individuals' lived experiences related to a particular phenomenon. The goal is to capture and articulate the core essence of these experiences as shared by multiple participants who have encountered the phenomenon.

Creswell (2014) defines the purpose of phenomenological research as exploring and uncovering the essence of individuals' lived experiences to understand their personal meanings and perspectives. This approach focuses on the deep, subjective realities of participants, emphasizing the importance of their voices and stories. For example, in Lauterbach's study (1993), the central phenomenon was the lived experiences of mothers who endured perinatal loss, specifically their memories and "living through" the loss. The study aimed to break the silence surrounding these experiences, portraying their meaning and amplifying their stories. By using phenomenological strategies like reflection and existential investigation, this method seeks to bring clarity and understanding to human experiences that are often overlooked or inadequately expressed.

In this study, a qualitative research approach underpinned by a phenomenological design was employed to explore the lived experiences of cyberbullying victimization among youths in Malaysia. This methodology was chosen for its ability to delve deeply into the subjective perspectives of participants, capturing the richness and complexity of their experiences. Face-to-face interviews and online interviews were conducted using a structured yet flexible format, allowing participants the freedom to openly share their insights and emotions. By focusing on the essence of their experiences, this study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which cyberbullying impacts young individuals. The findings are anticipated to contribute valuable understanding to the field, informing interventions and support strategies tailored to the unique needs of cyberbullying victims.

Sampling Procedures

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling method for this study due to its effectiveness in selecting participants who can provide the most relevant and meaningful insights into the research topic. According to Kelly (2010), purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals who are most likely to offer valuable and appropriate information aligned with the research objectives. This method ensures that the sample is specifically tailored to address the study's aims, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the findings.

In the context of this study, purposive sampling allowed for the inclusion of participants who have firsthand experience with cyberbullying victimization. By focusing on individuals who meet specific criteria—such as age, exposure to cyberbullying, and willingness to share their experiences—this approach ensures that the data collected is both rich and directly relevant. Campbell et al. (2020) highlight that purposive sampling

strengthens the rigor of qualitative research by closely aligning the sample with the research objectives, ultimately improving the trustworthiness and credibility of the data and results.

This targeted sampling strategy is particularly appropriate for exploring the complex and sensitive experiences of cyberbullying, as it facilitates the collection of in-depth, nuanced data from participants who can provide unique perspectives. By prioritizing the relevance and quality of information, purposive sampling helps uncover insights that might otherwise be overlooked in more generalized sampling methods, making it an ideal choice for this study.

Sample Size

In this study, the sample size is six participants. According to Morse (2000), phenomenological research typically involves collecting in-depth data through multiple interviews with each participant. This approach generates a substantial volume of rich, detailed data from each individual, thereby requiring a relatively small sample size—often between six and ten participants. While the sample size is modest, it is anticipated that the data collected from these participants will be robust and insightful, potentially achieving a satisfactory level of data saturation, estimated at approximately 70% (Saunders et al., 2017). Saturation is reached during data collection when no new themes, insights, or issues emerge, and the information begins to recur, making additional data collection unnecessary (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). It indicates that the sample size is sufficient for the study, as the data gathered adequately reflects the complexity, diversity, and depth of the phenomenon under investigation. Saturation serves as a key marker of data adequacy, ensuring that the study has captured the full range of nuances and perspectives related to the research topic.

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Youth

Youth, defined as individuals aged 15 to 30 in line with Malaysia's revised youth classification (BERNAMA, 2023), represent a critical demographic for understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying victimization. Globally, this age group is widely recognized as a formative stage in life, characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and social development. During this period, individuals are highly engaged with digital platforms for communication, education, and social interaction, making them particularly susceptible to cyberbullying. According to UNICEF (2019), youths constitute the largest group affected by cyberbullying in Malaysia, with three in ten young Malaysians reporting experiences of such incidents. By focusing on this age range, the study is able to capture a population deeply embedded in digital environments, where cyberbullying is most prevalent.

Gender

Individuals of both genders, male and female, are eligible to participate in this study, reflecting the inclusive nature of the research. Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that transcends gender boundaries, affecting individuals regardless of whether they identify as male or female. As highlighted by Patchin and Hinduja (2024), both males and females can be equally vulnerable to becoming victims of cyberbullying. Including participants of both genders allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue, capturing diverse experiences and perspectives that may vary based on gender. This inclusivity is crucial for exploring potential gender-specific patterns, behaviors, or impacts associated with cyberbullying, thereby enriching the findings and ensuring the study's relevance to the wider population. By doing so, the research will contribute to a balanced narrative that acknowledges the experiences of all individuals affected by cyberbullying.

Malaysian

Malaysia's alarming ranking as second in Asia and sixth globally for cyberbullying, coupled with reports that three in ten young Malaysians have experienced such victimization (UNICEF, 2019), highlights the urgency of addressing this issue. Furthermore, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) recorded 8,399 cyberbullying complaints from January to November 2024, averaging 27 cases daily, indicating a significant rise in incidents. These statistics make Malaysian youths a crucial group for understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying, providing valuable insights to inform effective interventions. Thus, Malaysians who are residing in Malaysia are eligible to participate in this research to convey the cultural and social context.

Location of Study

With participants' consent, this research conducted interviews at the participants' residences to ensure the data collection process is contextually grounded and meaningful. Visiting participants in their familiar environments not only fosters a sense of comfort and ease, encouraging them to share their experiences more openly but also allows the researcher to observe the surrounding environment. This setting provides valuable contextual insights, capturing subtle environmental and social cues that enrich the understanding of the participants' experiences. However, there are three participants who refused to conduct the interview in their space, the location has been discussed and eventually conducted in a counselling room, where provides quiet and comfortable environment space. There are also two participants' interview conducted via online due to the limitation of the long distance.

In this research, the materials used for data collection include paper and pen, as well as a notebook. These materials are commonly used in qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations. For interviews, researcher used paper and pen to record the

responses of the participants. Researcher wrote down the questions and take notes during the interview to capture important details and insights. The notebook serves as a convenient and organized space to document the interview process, record observations, and jot down any additional thoughts or reflections. Using paper and pen allows for flexibility and ease of use during interviews. It enables researchers to actively engage with the participants, maintain eye contact, and create a comfortable environment for open and honest communication. The use of paper and pen also allows for immediate documentation of information, ensuring accuracy and capturing the nuances of the participants' responses.

Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited through an online recruitment process. A poster containing information about the study was designed and disseminated via social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and Rednote, to reach potential participants. Interested individuals were directed to complete a Google Form, which was created to screen participants based on the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only individuals who met all inclusion criteria and none of the exclusion criteria were considered eligible to participate. Eligible participants were then contacted individually via WhatsApp to provide further information about the study and to arrange the details of the interview.

Ethical Clearance Approval

This research followed the university's ethical clearance procedure, which requires obtaining approval from relevant authorities before initiating data collection. The ethical clearance was obtained from the UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, as well as from the Supervisor (Dr. Anisah Zainab Musa), the Head of the Psychology and Counselling

Department, and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The ethical clearance approval was submitted with the proposed interview protocol.

Data Collection Procedure

Inclusion Criteria

Participants must be youths aged between 15 and 30 years old, as this range is associated with the definition of "youths" in Malaysia. Participants in this study must have firsthand experience with cyberbullying. This criterion ensures that the insights gathered are grounded in real-life encounters, enabling a deeper exploration of the phenomenon. Moreover, participants must be Malaysians residing in Malaysia to reflect the cultural and social context of the study. Participants should be able to communicate effectively in English or Malay to facilitate interviews and data collection. Participants must provide informed consent to ensure ethical participation in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who have not experienced cyberbullying will be excluded, as they do not meet the study's primary focus. Individuals currently undergoing treatment for severe psychological distress related to cyberbullying will be excluded to avoid exacerbating their condition during the research process. Participants who forget and are unable to recall the detailed memories of cyberbullying victimization experience will be excluded since it may cause insufficient data collection. Participants unable or unwilling to commit to the full duration of interviews or follow-up discussions will be excluded to maintain data integrity. Individuals who have experienced cyberbullying outside Malaysia will be excluded to ensure

the study remains focused on the Malaysian context. Individuals who decline to provide informed consent will be excluded to ensure ethical compliance and voluntary participation.

Data Sources

Triangulation

Triangulation is a key strategy for enhancing the quality of qualitative research by incorporating multiple perspectives. It is used not only to boost credibility through the application of diverse methods, theories, data sources, or researchers but also to facilitate a deeper understanding of complex phenomena by examining them from various angles (Santos et al., 2020). This approach acknowledges the existence of multiple realities (Saraswati et al., 2021) and is particularly beneficial in addressing less explored or unexplored research issues. Furthermore, triangulation is essential for studying intricate research phenomena, employing varied qualitative methods to generate rich, comprehensive data and achieve a nuanced understanding of the subject under investigation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023).

Data triangulation, as described by Donkoh and Mensah (2024), involves using multiple complementary data sources to examine a phenomenon. In qualitative research, primary data is often gathered through interviews and observations. A key element of triangulation includes writing field notes or reports during or immediately after data collection sessions. These notes capture additional contextual information that may not be directly recorded in interview transcripts or observation checklists. For example, non-verbal cues such as participants' reactions, gestures, or group dynamics, which might otherwise be overlooked, can provide critical insights. Writing field notes ensures these subtle behaviors are documented and incorporated into the analysis.

The primary goal of data triangulation is not only to obtain comprehensive insights into the phenomenon but also to validate and verify the collected data. By cross-referencing multiple data sources, researchers can identify inconsistencies, enhance the robustness of their findings, and provide a more reliable and well-rounded interpretation of the study's results (Donkoh & Mensah, 2024).

Validity of Data Collection Method

To enhance the validity of the data collection method, member checking and expert validation were employed. Member-checking involves providing data transcripts to some or all participants to obtain their feedback (McKim, 2023). Member checking was conducted by sending the interview transcripts to the respective participants for their review and confirmation. Participants were invited to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and to clarify or add any additional information if necessary, ensuring that their views were accurately represented. This approach reduces the risk of inaccuracies during data analysis (Candela, 2019).

In addition, two experts in the field were consulted to validate the data collection process and tools. The experts reviewed the interview protocol, questions, and procedures to ensure that they were appropriate, clear, and aligned with the research objectives. Feedback from the experts was incorporated to refine and strengthen the data collection method, thereby increasing its credibility and trustworthiness.

Furthermore, expert validation was also applied to the results and findings of the data analysis. After the data were analyzed, the two experts reviewed the emerging themes, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure that they accurately reflected the participants' narratives and were consistent with the research objectives. The experts provided feedback on the clarity, coherence, and relevance of the findings. Their suggestions were incorporated to enhance the credibility, confirmability, and overall rigor of the study.

In conclusion, the validity of the data collection method was strengthened through the use of member checking and expert validation. Member checking ensured that participants' perspectives were accurately captured and represented, minimizing the risk of misinterpretation. Expert validation further enhanced the credibility of the study by confirming the appropriateness and clarity of the data collection tools and procedures, as well as verifying the accuracy and relevance of the data analysis and findings. Together, these strategies contributed significantly to the overall trustworthiness, rigor, and validity of the research process.

Data Collection Procedures

Interview

This research employed a diverse approach to data collection, combining one-on-one semi-structured interviews with direct observational methods to gain comprehensive insights.

In-depth interviews are a qualitative technique centered on direct, individual interactions between researchers and participants, designed to uncover participants' experiences and perspectives on a given topic (Lim, 2024). These interviews are particularly effective for exploring sensitive or complex issues, offering the flexibility to delve deeply into personal thoughts and emotions. Their conversational nature allows researchers to capture not only what participants think but also the reasoning behind their perspectives, often revealing unexpected insights and providing a richer understanding of the subject matter.

Semi-structured interviews, described by Magaldi and Berler (2020) as a flexible yet focused method, are guided by predefined themes while allowing for adaptability during the conversation. This approach enables researchers to adjust their questions in response to the context and participants' input, fostering deeper exploration and discovery. A carefully

crafted interview guide ensures that key topics are addressed while leaving room for spontaneity and participant-driven dialogue, resulting in meaningful and context-sensitive discussions (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The semi-structured interviews were follow a prepared guide containing key themes and topics related to cyberbullying victimization, ensuring all critical areas are covered while allowing flexibility to adapt to participants' responses. The researcher used open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences in-depth, followed by follow-up questions and probes to clarify and expand on their answers.

Observation

Observation serves as a fundamental aspect of qualitative research, offering researchers the opportunity to directly engage with and examine cultural norms, social interactions, and processes in their natural settings. By immersing themselves in the environment, researchers can gather insights that go beyond self-reported data from interviews or surveys, capturing the nuances of human behavior and interactions in real-life contexts (Lim, 2024). Participant observation is particularly effective in uncovering local practices, values, reasoning, norms, technologies, and processes that shape the social and cultural fabric of communities (Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023).

As Lai (2024) highlights, the notable advantage of observation lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of a particular setting. Observing individuals in their natural environment reveals behaviors and interactions that may differ from their self-reported accounts, offering a richer, more contextualized perspective. Observational data can enhance and complement findings from other qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, by adding depth and context to reported experiences or behaviors.

In this study, observations were integrated alongside interviews, with the researcher actively engaging in interview sessions to observe and document non-verbal cues, interactions, and empathetic behaviors displayed by participants. Detailed field notes were maintained throughout this process, serving as real-time records of the observations. These notes captured critical aspects such as the physical environment, participants' demeanor, and key interactions, offering valuable context and enriching the overall findings of the research.

Procedures for Obtaining Consent

Prior to their involvement, participants were required to formally confirm their agreement to participate by signing the consent form in person or submitting their consent via email. During physical interviews, participants were provided with a consent document outlining the details of the study. Informed consent, a fundamental aspect of research ethics, refers to a voluntary decision made with a comprehensive understanding and detailed information about the study, ensuring adherence to the ethical principles of respect, fairness, and beneficence (Xu et al., 2020). The consent process ensures that participants fully understand the nature of the research, its purpose, and their rights, including the option to decline participation. Only individuals who provide explicit informed consent were allowed to proceed to the interview phase, while those who choose not to consent can opt-out without any negative repercussions. For online interview, online informed consents were sent and received. All of the participants provided the informed consent.

To further ensure ethical compliance, participants were informed that their involvement is entirely voluntary, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any point, without facing any adverse consequences. Before obtaining consent, researchers thoroughly explained the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, allowing participants the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification. This transparent and

participant-centered approach guarantees that their decision to participate is fully informed and voluntary, adhering to the highest standards of ethical research practices.

Interview Protocol

The data collection involved a series of mainly open-ended, semi-structured questions designed to explore participants' experiences with cyberbullying. The questions covered three key areas: the perception of strain due to cyberbullying, the impacts of cyberbullying on emotional, behavioral, and physical well-being, and the coping strategies victims employed. The interview began with introductory questions aimed at ensuring participant comfort and establishing rapport. Most of the questions invited detailed narrative responses, encouraging participants to freely describe their experiences, feelings, and reflections. Probing sub-questions were included to prompt deeper elaboration when needed, allowing the interviewer flexibility to follow up based on participant responses. Emotional sensitivity was evident in the phrasing, with participants being given the opportunity to decline to answer if they felt uncomfortable. Overall, the form of the questions was primarily open-ended, fostering a conversational flow, while the content focused on personal experiences, emotional reactions, behavioral changes, coping mechanisms, and reflective advice for others.

Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you feel comfortable to start the interview? 2. Do you feel comfortable to share your experience of cyberbullying victimization at this moment? 3. Can you introduce yourself?
RO1: To examine the ways in which victims of cyberbullying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe your experience of being cyberbullied?

<p>perceive strain due to the cyberbullying.</p> <p>RQ1: How do victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying?</p>	<p>1.1 What kind of messages or actions were involved in the bullying?</p> <p>1.2 Did the cyberbullying happen on specific platforms or across multiple ones?</p> <p>1.3 Were the perpetrators known to you or anonymous?</p> <p>2. How often did the cyberbullying occur, and over what period?</p> <p>2.1 Was there a particular time of day or event that triggered the bullying?</p> <p>2.2 Did the intensity of the bullying change over time?</p> <p>3. What were the most upsetting or difficult aspects of the cyberbullying experience for you?</p> <p>3.1 Did you find certain messages or behaviors more distressing than others?</p> <p>3.2 Were there specific moments or incidents that felt particularly overwhelming?</p> <p>3.3 Did the actions of bystanders (e.g., likes, shares, or comments) impact your feelings?</p> <p>4. How did you feel when the cyberbullying incidents happened?</p> <p>4.1 Can you describe any immediate emotional responses you experienced?</p> <p>4.2 Did your feelings change as the bullying continued?</p> <p>4.3 Were there specific triggers that heightened your emotional reactions?</p>
<p>RO2: To explore the impacts of cyberbullying on victims.</p>	<p>5. How has cyberbullying affected your emotional or mental well-being?</p>

<p>RQ2: What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?</p>	<p>5.1 Did you experience feelings like anxiety, depression, or fear?</p> <p>5.2 Were there moments when you felt emotionally overwhelmed or numb?</p> <p>6. Have you noticed any changes in your behaviour or habits after experiencing cyberbullying?</p> <p>6.1 Did you start avoiding specific online platforms or social situations?</p> <p>6.2 Did you change the way you communicate with others online or offline?</p> <p>6.3 Have you developed new habits, positive or negative, as a result of the experience?</p> <p>7. Did you experience physical symptoms (e.g., stress-related illnesses) as a result of being cyberbullied?</p> <p>7.1 Did you notice changes in your sleep patterns or appetite?</p> <p>7.2 Did you experience headaches, stomach aches, or other stress-related symptoms?</p> <p>7.3 How long did these physical symptoms persist, if they occurred?</p> <p>8. Did the experience of being cyberbullied influence your relationships with friends or family?</p> <p>8.1 Did you feel more isolated or withdrawn from those around you?</p> <p>8.2 Were there moments where you felt supported or let down by others?</p> <p>8.3 Did the experience change how you trust or communicate with people?</p>
<p>RO3: To investigate the coping strategies employed by victims</p>	<p>9. How did you initially react to the cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>9.1 Did you respond immediately or take time to process what happened?</p>

<p>of cyberbullying in response to the strain they experienced.</p> <p>RQ3: What coping strategies do victims of cyberbullying employed in response to the strain they experienced?</p>	<p>9.2 Did you experience any difficulty deciding how to react?</p> <p>9.3 Were your initial reactions driven by fear, anger, or another emotion?</p> <p>10. What actions, if any, did you take to address or stop the cyberbullying?</p> <p>10.1 Did you block or report the bully? If yes, how effective was it?</p> <p>10.2 Did you try to confront the bully or address the situation directly?</p> <p>10.3 Did you seek advice from anyone before taking action?</p> <p>11. Were there any strategies you used to cope with the emotional strain caused by the bullying?</p> <p>11.1 Do you find it was effective after using the coping strategies?</p> <p>11.2 How the coping strategies can help you?</p> <p>11.3 Do you find any changes after applying the coping strategies?</p> <p>12. Did you seek help from friends, family, or professionals?</p> <p>12.1 What kind of support have you received?</p> <p>12.2 How did they react when you shared your experience?</p> <p>12.3 Were there any suggestions or actions from others that were particularly helpful?</p> <p>13. Did you ever consider or engage in maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., suicide attempt, retaliating, substance use)?</p> <p>13.1 What are the maladaptive coping strategies used?</p> <p>13.2 How do you develop the thought of engaging in maladaptive coping strategy?</p>
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	<p>13.3 Did you recognize these coping mechanisms as harmful at the time?</p> <p>14. Looking back, is there anything you wish you had done differently to handle the situation?</p> <p>14.1 Are there specific actions you regret not taking sooner?</p> <p>14.2 What advice would you give to someone in a similar situation?</p> <p>14.3 How do you think a different approach might have changed your experience?</p>
Concluding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there anything you think is important for me to know that we haven't discussed yet? 2. Looking back at today's conversation, is there anything you would like to add or clarify? 3. How did you find this interview process? 4. What are your thoughts or feelings after discussing these topics today?

Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves the intentional and ongoing recognition of one's own beliefs, biases, and judgment systems before, throughout, and following the research process (Jamieson et al., 2023). In this study, reflexivity played a central role in ensuring the credibility and authenticity of the data collection process. Recognizing that own background, beliefs, and emotional responses could influence the research, the researcher adopted proactive approaches to managing reflexivity from the outset.

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher engaged in self-reflection to identify any assumptions or preconceived notions held about cyberbullying, particularly given the sensitive and emotional nature of the topic. Deshpande and Rao (2020) emphasize that reflective practice is essential for researchers to critically assess their internal biases, assumptions, and emotional reactions. This ongoing self-examination not only strengthens personal research skills but also improves the depth and quality of research findings by encouraging heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to the research context. Researcher kept a reflexive journal to document own expectations, personal experiences related to online behaviour, and any potential biases that might unconsciously shape the way interacted with participants. This initial self-awareness helped researcher approach each interview with openness and a genuine commitment to understanding the participants' unique experiences rather than projecting own interpretations onto their narratives.

During the interviews, the researcher remained mindful of role as a researcher and the influence could exert, both verbally and non-verbally. The researcher made deliberate efforts to maintain a neutral, non-judgmental tone, using open-ended and non-leading questions to encourage participants to share freely without feeling steered toward any particular type of response. When emotionally charged moments arose, researcher practiced active listening and maintained a supportive presence while carefully avoiding inserting own emotions or opinions into the conversation. Additionally, researcher paid attention to own body language, facial expressions, and feedback signals to ensure that participants felt safe and validated, yet not directed or pressured. The flexible, semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed researcher to follow participants' cues and explore areas they found most significant, while remaining anchored to the research objectives.

After each interview, the researcher revisited reflexive journal to critically reflect on the interaction, noting any emotional reactions, emerging biases, or unexpected insights that

surfaced during the conversation. Reflexive writing is widely recognized as a key strategy for practicing reflexivity. It involves creating documents such as researcher memos, field notes, and other forms of written or recorded reflections at any stage of the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). This post-interview reflection helped me continuously refine researcher's interviewing techniques and remain vigilant against the potential distortion of data through personal lens.

Furthermore, the researcher engaged in periodic discussions with peers and academic supervisors, a form of informal peer debriefing, to cross-examine researcher's interpretations and ensure that they were grounded in the participants' words rather than my assumptions. In research that deals with sensitive topics like trauma narratives, supervision creates a supportive environment where researchers can work through emotional challenges, recognize potential biases, and navigate ethical issues, ultimately promoting both their well-being and professional development (Deshpande & Rao, 2024). Regular meetings with academic supervisor and peers provided a valuable opportunity to critically reflect on own positionality, assumptions, and emotional responses during the research. Through these discussions, the researcher was encouraged to examine how my background and perspectives might influence the way researcher conducted interviews, interpreted participants' narratives, and engaged with sensitive topics like cyberbullying. By consistently practicing reflexivity throughout the data-collection process, researcher aimed to uphold the integrity of the research, prioritize the authentic voices of cyberbullying victims, and produce findings that are both trustworthy and meaningful.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Thematic Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts. This method provided a structured yet flexible framework for uncovering the nuanced experiences of the participants, enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. This study employed a manual approach to thematic analysis, foregoing the use of specialized software or automated tools. Manual analysis involves a detailed and systematic process of reading and analyzing transcripts, enabling researchers to deeply engage with the data and uncover the subtle nuances of participants' experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This hands-on method ensures a direct connection to the data, fostering a thorough understanding of the themes that emerge.

Thematic analysis is a widely used method for examining qualitative data, focusing on identifying and interpreting patterns within a dataset to uncover their underlying meanings (Xu & Zammit, 2020; Liebenberg et al., 2020). This approach follows key principles, including data coding, searching for themes, refining these themes, and presenting the findings, making it comparable to other qualitative methods like discourse analysis (Flick, 2022). The emphasis lies on converting unprocessed data into a well-structured narrative that not only answers the research question but also adds meaningful insights to the existing academic discourse (Lim, 2024). One of the well-known thematic analysis frameworks was developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006).

This framework consists of six key stages. The first stage is **familiarization with the data**. The first stage of the process involves researchers immersing themselves fully in the data, dedicating time and attention to understanding its depth and complexity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entails meticulously reading and re-reading the entire dataset, which allows patterns and nuances to gradually surface (Lim, 2024). Such repeated engagement

fosters an intimate familiarity with the content, enabling researchers to grasp subtle details and underlying meanings within the data. This involves reading and re-reading interview transcripts, listening to interview audio recordings, and reviewing field notes. During this phase, the researcher listened carefully to how participants describe their experiences—such as what happened, how they felt, what impact it had and how they coped.

The second step is **generating initial codes**. Coding serves as the cornerstone of thematic analysis, where data is systematically examined, compared, and contrasted to uncover key patterns and recurring elements (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This stage involves generating codes across the entire dataset in an inclusive manner, without attempting to organize them into a broader structure at this point. It entails the process of categorization, where specific segments of data that illustrate a particular phenomenon are identified and labeled (Spiggle, 1994). In this phase, the researcher starts systematically coding the transcripts. These codes help to break the data into manageable parts while keeping the essence of what participants are saying.

Table 1: Examples of generating initial codes

Extracts	Statements	Initial codes
E6	"Most of my social media was hacked by the perpetrator, including Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and Wechat. He also disclosed my private information on my university Facebook page including my address, phone number, identity card number. He also used my account to call my university presidents and other teachers."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hacking of personal social media • Disclosure of private and sensitive information

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy violations
E25,	"When interacting with others, I constantly remind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-censorship in
E27	myself to be cautious, to not share everything with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conversations
	people." "I started feeling like people were always	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-control of
	observing me, which made me very conscious of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-expression
	my words and actions, always trying to be extra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in
	careful."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communication
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> style
E48,	"My boyfriend played a big role in supporting me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support
E49	during that time... helped me find ways to respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical coping
	to the situation, which made me feel better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assistance
	emotionally." "I was also really touched by the	
	rational netizens who defended me and spoke up—	
	they brought me a sense of warmth amidst	
	everything."	

As a next step, **searching for themes**. At this point in the analysis, researchers start to merge individual codes into broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Abstraction was used in broadening the scope of the codes, transforming them into more general themes that reveal underlying patterns and concepts beyond the raw data. The comparison focuses on identifying the similarities and differences between codes, helping to understand their interconnections and how they can form cohesive, overarching themes. This stage is centered on making conceptual connections, with the detailed steps of abstraction and comparison guiding the creation of a thematic structure that reflects the data's core insights.

Dimensionalization comes into play as each theme is enriched by various relevant codes that add depth and detail to its meaning. With all transcripts coded, the researcher identified broader themes by grouping similar codes together.

Table 2: Examples of searching for themes

Initial codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hacking of personal social media • Disclosure of private and sensitive information • Privacy violations 	Strain originating from Perpetrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-censorship in conversations • Over-control of self-expression • Change in communication style 	Behavioural Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support • Practical coping assistance 	Adaptive Coping

In the subsequent phase, **reviewing themes**. At this juncture, themes were refined through processes of splitting, merging, or eliminating until they truly reflect the complexities and subtleties of the data. Key principles such as integration and refutation play a crucial role here (Spiggle, 1994). Integration involves bringing together themes in a way that creates a unified structure, accurately portraying the data as a whole. Refutation entails rigorously testing each theme against counterexamples or conflicting evidence within the data to ensure that the themes are both comprehensive and reliable. By synthesizing themes into a cohesive framework and challenging them with opposing evidence, researchers ensured that

the final themes are not only logically consistent but also firmly grounded in the data. The researcher re-examined the themes to make sure they accurately represent the data.

Moving on to the fifth step which is **defining and naming themes**. As the analysis progresses, the themes are further defined and refined, with each being assigned a precise and meaningful label (Lim, 2024). This stage requires identifying the core aspect of the data that each theme represents and understanding how it contributes to the broader narrative the data conveys. Researchers carefully examine each theme's underlying essence to ensure that it accurately encapsulates the key elements of the data. This process often involves a deeper exploration of the themes' significance and how they interconnect, ensuring that they are not only descriptive but also conceptually rich. Through this detailed analysis and naming process, the themes take on a clearer form, helping to illuminate the deeper meanings embedded in the data and creating a cohesive understanding of the research findings. The researcher clearly defined each theme and ensured it captures a distinct and meaningful aspect of the participants' experiences.

Lastly, **reporting themes**. The final stage involves crafting the analytic narrative, which is positioning the themes within the context of the research question and relevant literature. The narrative should tell a clear and convincing story about the data, supported by strong examples that highlight key findings (Lim, 2024). It is essential that this narrative reflects a deep understanding of the data, guiding the reader through the reasoning behind the emergence of each theme and illustrating how they were derived from the data itself. The researcher wrote the findings section of the report. Each theme is discussed in detail, supported by direct quotes from participants. After the data were analyzed, the data were further validated by two experts and little modification was made according to experts' suggestions.

Demographic of the Participants

Table 3: Demographic of the Participants

Demographic	Participant P0	Participant P1	Participant P2	Participant P3	Participant P4	Participant P5	Participant P6
Factors							
Age	22	23	20	24	23	25	22
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Employment	Student	Student	Student	Student	Employed	Employed	Student
Status							
State	Penang	Johor	KL	Perak	Penang	Pahang	Penang

Experience-related Characteristics of Participants

Table 4: Experience-related Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Participant P0	Participant P1	Participant P2	Participant P3	Participant P4	Participant P5	Participant P6
Types of Cyberbullying	Defamation	Harassment	Harassment, Sexting, Defamation, Flaming, Deception	Sexting, Harassment	Cyberstalking, Harassment, Defamation, Flaming	Cyberstalking, Harassment, Defamation, Doxxing, Deception	Exclusion, Harassment, Deception
Platforms of Cyberbullying	WeChat	Facebook, Messenger	Discord, Facebook, Instagram	Facebook, Messenger	Facebook, Messenger	Facebook, WeChat, Instagram, Messenger	Facebook, Messenger
Duration of Cyberbullying	1 -2 days	Few weeks	3 years	6 months	1.5 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	Few months

Participant P0 is a 22-year-old female student also from Penang. She experienced defamation on WeChat at the age of 13, and the incident lasted for one to two days.

Participant P1 is a 23-year-old female who is currently a student residing in Johor. She experienced cyberbullying in the form of harassment when she was 17 years old. The platform used for the harassment was Facebook and Messenger, and the duration of the cyberbullying lasted a few weeks.

Participant P2 is a 20-year-old female student from Kuala Lumpur. She experienced multiple types of cyberbullying, including harassment, sexting, defamation, flaming, and deception at the age of 16. The platforms involved were Discord, Facebook, and Instagram. The cyberbullying lasted for approximately three years.

Participant P3 is a 24-year-old female student from Perak. She encountered sexting and harassment through Facebook and Messenger when she was 16 years old. The duration of her cyberbullying experience was about six months.

Participant P4 is a 23-year-old male who is employed and living in Penang. He experienced cyberstalking, harassment, defamation, and flaming at the age of 13. The platforms used were Facebook and Messenger, and the cyberbullying lasted for around one and a half to two years.

Participant P5 is a 25-year-old female from Pahang who is employed. Her experience involved cyberstalking, harassment, defamation, outing, and deception, beginning at age 18.

The platforms used included Facebook, WeChat, Instagram, and Messenger. The duration of the cyberbullying was between two to three years.

Participant P6 is a 22-year-old female student from Penang. She faced exclusion, harassment, and deception via Facebook and Messenger when she was 12 years old. The cyberbullying lasted for a few months.

Field Notes

Table 5: Field Notes

Participant	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Participant P1	Participant comfortably sat and leaning back on the sofa	Suggest participant felt safe and unguarded to share
	Participant demonstrated a clear tone of voice in delivery	Reflect to a level of emotional readiness in sharing experience
	Participant maintained steady eye contact most of the time during interview	Reflect participant's engagement in the interview and focus on the conversation
Participant P2	Participant maintained steady eye contact most of the time during interview	Suggests participant was deeply engaged in the interview
	Participant responded with extensive and detailed explanations	Suggests participant is willing to share openly and are invested in the conversation
Participant P3	Participant responded with brief and simple answers	Suggests participant may not feel safe enough yet to open fully
	Participant sat stiffly on the sofa, maintaining rigid posture	May reflect participant internal tension and nervousness
	Participant spoke in low volume and occasionally unstable tone, especially discussing sensitive issues	Suggests participant may still feel reluctant in talking about the topic open fully
Participant P4	Participant responded with brief and simple answers	Suggests participant has not yet had space to deeply reflect on the experience

	Participant maintained eye contact during session	Reflects participant's engagement and attention during session
Participant P5	Participant responded with extensive and detailed explanations	Suggests participant is willing to share openly and are invested in the conversation
	Participant demonstrated a clear tone of voice in delivery	Reflects to a level of emotional readiness in sharing experience
Participant P6	Participant maintained steady eye contact most of the time with sometimes avoided	Reflects participant's engagement, eye contact broken when participant was trying to recall details
	Participant demonstrated a clear tone of voice in delivery	Reflects to a level of emotional readiness in sharing experience

Participant P1 sat comfortably, leaning back on the sofa during the interview, which suggests that she felt safe and unguarded to share her experience. She also demonstrated a clear tone of voice throughout the session, reflecting a level of emotional readiness in discussing her experience with cyberbullying. Furthermore, she maintained steady eye contact for most of the interview, which indicates her engagement in the interview process and her focus on the conversation.

Participant P2 maintained steady eye contact for most of the interview session, suggesting that she was deeply engaged in the conversation. She responded with extensive and detailed explanations, indicating a willingness to share openly and a strong investment in the interview process. Her responses reflect both cognitive clarity and emotional openness in recounting her cyberbullying experiences.

Participant P3 provided brief and simple answers during the interview, which may suggest that she did not feel fully safe or comfortable enough yet to open up in depth. Her body language further supported this, as she sat stiffly on the sofa and maintained a rigid posture — potentially reflecting internal tension and nervousness. Additionally, her tone of voice was low and occasionally unstable, especially when discussing sensitive issues, which suggests some reluctance or emotional struggle in talking about her experiences openly.

Participant P4 also responded with brief and simple answers, which may indicate that he has not yet had sufficient space or time to deeply reflect on his cyberbullying experience. However, he maintained eye contact throughout the session, which reflects his attentiveness and engagement in the interview despite the limited verbal expression.

Participant P5 responded with extensive and detailed explanations during the interview, which suggests that she was willing to share openly and showed a high level of investment in the conversation. Her delivery was accompanied by a clear tone of voice, which reflects a readiness and comfort in revisiting and expressing her experiences related to cyberbullying.

Participant P6 maintained steady eye contact for most of the session, though occasionally avoided it. This pattern reflects her engagement in the interview, with eye contact being broken during moments when she appeared to be recalling specific details. She also demonstrated a clear tone of voice in her delivery, indicating a level of emotional readiness and composure in sharing her personal experiences.

Table 6: Table for themes and Sub-themes

Research Objectives and Research Questions		Themes	Sub-themes
RO1	To examine the ways in which victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying.	Strain Originating from the	1.1 Self-blame and Guilt
		Victims	1.2 Unreciprocated Emotional Investment
			1.3 Helplessness
RQ1	How do victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying?	Strain Originating from the	2.1 Threats, Coercion, and Harassment
		Perpetrators	2.2 Emotional Manipulation
			2.3 Privacy Violations
			2.4 Public Shaming and Mockery
			2.5 Group and Repetitive Aggression
			2.6 Betrayal
RO2	To explore the impacts of cyberbullying on victims.	Strain Originating from the	3.1 Lack of Support and Invalidating Reactions
		Significant Others	3.2 Witnessing Significant Others in Distress
		Emotional Impacts	4.1 Fear, Anxiety and Panic
			4.2 Numbness
			4.3 Depression and Sadness

		4.4 Anger	
		4.5 Guilt	
		4.6 Helplessness	
RQ2	What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?	Behavioral Impacts	5.1 Social Withdrawal and Isolation
			5.2 Online Disengagement and Avoidance
			5.3 Change in Communication Style
			5.4 Changes in Life Choices
		Relationship Impacts	6.1 Friendship breakdown
			6.2 Changes in Family Dynamics
			6.3 Trust Issues
		Cognitive Impacts	7.1 Hypervigilance and Overthinking
			7.2 Negative Self-Appraisal
		Physical Impacts	8.1 Sleep Disturbance
			8.2 Appetite Issues
			8.3 Stress-related Physical Symptoms

RO3	To investigate the coping strategies employed by cyberbullying victims in response to the strain they experienced.	Adaptive Coping	9.1 Emotional Expression & Release 9.2 Problem-Focused Coping 9.3 Seeking Support 9.4 Self-Talk
RQ3	What coping strategies do victims of cyberbullying employed in response to the strain they experienced?	Maladaptive Coping	10.1 Self-Blame and Internalization 10.2 Risky Behavior or Attempt 10.3 Ineffective Conflict Management 10.4 Suppression

Theme 1: Strain Originating from the Victims

Sub-theme 1.1: Self-Blame and Guilt

Based on the participants' experiences, three out of six participants perceived their strain originating from self-blame and feelings of guilt, which refers to the emotional distress victims feel when they internalize the bullying, believing it might be their own fault or feeling guilty about their reactions or decisions.

"The most upsetting part was, what the perpetrator said was "I want to make your friend feel alone in life, because I'm alone right now"... he said if you don't leave him, I will come and kidnap you. If the part where I leave my friends, it will make me feel guilty."

(E51;E53, Participant P1)

The quote shows internalized strain as the participant is caught between fear for her own safety and guilt over potentially abandoning her friend. This emotional burden—fear mixed with self-imposed guilt—intensifies her distress, making her feel responsible for a situation she couldn't control.

"At first, when there are just several people involved in cyberbullying, we strongly believe that we are doing the right things. However, when the perpetrators become more and more, we start to wonder if it is our fault, are our rules too strict? "

(E16, Participant P2)

This statement exemplifies internalized strain, where the victim turns distress inward, leading to self-questioning, guilt, or even a perceived sense of responsibility for the abuse. As the number of perpetrators increased, the victim's initial confidence shifted to self-doubt, wondering if their rules were too strict.

"I felt regret because I should not send him my photos in the first place...I will judge myself a lot more since I have made this stupid decision. "

(E30;E52, Participant P3)

This statement reflects internalized strain, as the participant directs blame and criticism inward rather than toward the perpetrator. By labelling her actions as a "stupid decision" and judging herself harshly, she internalizes the guilt and shame of the cyberbullying incident.

Sub-theme 1.2 Unreciprocated Emotional Investment

Based on their experiences, two out of six participants perceived the strain originating from victims themselves through unreciprocated emotional investment. This refers to the emotional distress that occurs when individuals put genuine effort, care, or emotional energy into others or situations, but do not receive the same in return.

"Firstly, I thought that there may be a misunderstanding or miscommunication. So, I tried to let the perpetrators know more about our efforts put in the server, wondering if they will change and stop their behaviour. But unfortunately, no. "

(E56, Participant P2)

This statement reflects strain originating from the victim through unreciprocated emotional investment, as the participant made a sincere effort to resolve the conflict by explaining their intentions and the work they had put into managing the server. She hoped that by showing understanding and empathy, the perpetrators might change their behaviour. However, her efforts were met with continued hostility, leaving her emotionally let down and disappointed. This lack of reciprocation—where her genuine attempts at peace and connection were ignored or rejected—created emotional strain, as the energy and care she invested were not only unacknowledged but dismissed.

"I felt wronged because I only wanted to be friends with them, but in the end, my sincerity and genuineness was not reciprocated, and I was made fun of. I had no ill intentions."

(E22, Participant P6)

This statement reflects strain originating from the victim through unreciprocated emotional investment, as the participant had put genuine effort and emotion into building what she believed could be meaningful friendships. She admired the perpetrators and consistently tried to connect with them in positive, friendly ways. However, her emotional openness was not only ignored but met with mockery. The emotional strain came from the imbalance between what she gave emotionally and what she received in return, leaving her feeling wronged and confused about why her kindness was met with cruelty.

Sub-theme 1.3 Helplessness

Based on their experiences, two out of six participants perceived the strain originating from their feelings of helplessness. This refers to the emotional strain that arises when victims feel powerless to stop the cyberbullying, escape the situation, or defend themselves.

"The most upsetting was that I felt very helpless. It was like, I couldn't go anywhere. So, I stayed at home for a lot of time. And, I felt like I couldn't do anything about it. So, I could

only live in fear."

(E43, Participant P1)

The strain in this context stems from the overwhelming feelings of helplessness the participant experienced. Her inability to take action or escape the situation created intense emotional pressure, as she felt trapped and vulnerable. The loss of control over her safety and

environment became a direct source of strain, fuelling persistent fear and emotional exhaustion. This helplessness wasn't just a response—it was the core of the strain itself, shaping her behaviour and emotional state throughout the experience.

“I felt helpless and didn’t know how to explain things in a way that would make them believe me.”

(E6, Participant P5)

This reflects the internalized strain of helplessness, where the participant feels powerless to change how others perceive her despite her efforts. This sense of defeat, caused by repeated failures to gain understanding or support, lead her to begins internalizing the belief that speaking up is futile, which deepens her emotional strain.

Theme 2: Strain Originating from the Perpetrators

Sub-theme 2.1: Threats, Coercion, and Harassment

According to their experiences, three out of six participants perceived the strain originating from the perpetrators by threats, coercion and harassment. This refers to the emotional and psychological pressure victims experience when perpetrators use intimidation, manipulation, or persistent bullying to control, scare, or wear them down.

“So he said if you don't leave your friend, I will come and kidnap you...making me feel terrifying. ”

(E51;E53, Participant P1)

This quote reflects strain originating from the perpetrator through threat, coercion, and harassment, as he uses fear tactics to control the participant’s behavior. The explicit threat of kidnapping is a direct form of psychological intimidation, creating intense emotional distress

and forcing her into a fearful, pressured state—key features of strain induced by abusive external force.

“Our pictures are being edited inappropriately (with dicks) using Photoshop.” “He makes fun of my body, attacks my parents, and sends inappropriate messages (Do you want to suck my dick?) and photos (dick photos) to me.”

(E6;E20, Participant P2)

These statements reflect strain originating from the perpetrator through harassment, coercion, and threats, as the victim was subjected to repeated sexualized abuse, body shaming, and personal attacks. The use of edited images and explicit messages represents targeted, degrading harassment meant to intimidate, humiliate, and provoke intense strain.

“At first I rejected his requests to have sex texting. However, he was very pushy and threatened me that if I do not do this, then he will share my videos with other people. Because we have added each other as friends on Facebook, he threatened me that he will send it to my followers on Facebook one by one. So, I got scared and complied with him.”

(E18, Participant P3)

This statement clearly illustrates strain originating from the perpetrator through harassment, coercion, and threats. The participant initially resisted but was overwhelmed by persistent pressure and explicit threats of exposure. The fear of public humiliation and privacy invasion forced her into compliance, showing how the perpetrator’s aggressive tactics created intense psychological strain.

Sub-theme 2.2: Emotional Manipulation

Based on their experiences, three out of six participants perceived strain originating from perpetrator by emotional manipulation. This involves deliberate psychological tactics used by perpetrators to distort or influence the victim's emotions for the purpose of exerting control, causing confusion, or inflicting emotional pain.

"The most upsetting part was, what the perpetrator said was "I want to make your friend feel alone in life, because I'm alone right now."

(E51, Participant P1)

This quote reflects strain from the perpetrator's emotional manipulation, as he projects his own loneliness to justify harming others and guilt-trips the participant into isolating her friend. By framing his actions as emotionally driven, he manipulates her sense of empathy and loyalty, creating deep emotional conflict and distress.

"At first, he kept propagating himself as a good Christian boy and made me believe in him. After this, he was telling me that sexting and exchanging naked photos are what friends do. At First I was questioning and doubting it, but he kept pushing me to do it and eventually I fell for it."

(E22, Participant P3)

The statement reflects emotional manipulation as the perpetrator gained the participant's trust by presenting himself as a "good Christian boy" and then distorted the concept of friendship to normalize inappropriate behaviour. By repeatedly insisting that sexting was something friends do, he created confusion and emotional pressure, leading the participant to question her own values and eventually comply. This shows how the perpetrator subtly manipulated her emotions and beliefs to control her actions.

“I remember there was a time when one of the perpetrators came and texted me that she wanted to be friends with me. At that moment, I was shocked and really happy. I replied to her “really?” and she told me that it was a punishment for truth or dare, so asking me as a friend is one of their dare. Then, she said that I was silly to believe her at first. So, I was sad.”

(E14, Participant P6)

This statement reflects strain originating from the perpetrator through emotional manipulation, as the participant was deliberately misled into believing she was being genuinely accepted. The perpetrator exploited her desire for friendship to create false hope, only to later reveal it was a joke tied to a game. This intentional manipulation of her emotions for amusement caused deep emotional harm, resulting in strain.

Sub-theme 2.3 Privacy Violations

Based on their experiences, two out of six participants perceived strain originating from perpetrator by privacy violations. This refers to the emotional distress caused when perpetrators invade a victim’s personal space or expose private information without consent.

“He said, ‘I know where you live, I know your class, I know where you usually go to, I will come and look for you. I will kidnap you and I will rape you, if you continue talking to the friend.’”

(E34, Participant P1)

This quote reflects strain from privacy violations, as the perpetrator weaponizes the participant’s personal information—where she lives, studies, and spends time—to instil fear

and control her actions. Knowing such details without consent creates a deep sense of vulnerability and loss of safety, intensifying the emotional strain caused by the threat.

"Most of my social media was hacked by the perpetrator, including Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and WeChat. He also disclosed my private information on my university Facebook page including my address, phone number, identity card number. He also used my account to call my university presidents and other teachers."

(E6, Participant P5)

The participant's experience illustrates strain originating from the perpetrator through privacy violations, as the hacker invaded multiple personal platforms and exposed sensitive information without consent. By hacking her accounts and publicly disclosing her address, phone number, and ID number, the perpetrator breached her digital boundaries and personal security. This created intense emotional distress and fear, as the victim lost control over her private identity and was forced to endure public exposure and humiliation.

Sub-theme 2.4 Public Shaming and Mockery

Based on their experiences, three out of six participants perceived strain originating from perpetrators by public shaming and mockery. This refers to the emotional harm caused when perpetrators ridicule, humiliate, or degrade victims in public or online spaces.

"I felt particularly overwhelmed the moment they shared my photos on Facebook to make fun of me. Also, the comments below the posts are also overwhelming for me. They are commenting about my appearances and trying to make fun of me. Some were just trying to label me as something bad like a dog or something."

(E26, Participant P4)

This statement reflects strain from public shaming and mockery, as the participant experienced intense emotional distress when their photos were publicly posted on Facebook to ridicule them. The mocking comments, especially those attacking their appearance and labelling them with dehumanizing terms like “a dog,” represent a clear form of public humiliation. This kind of targeted, visible mockery by perpetrators created overwhelming strain.

“The second bullying incident started when a clip of my speech from a debate competition was maliciously edited and taken out of context, then posted on a Facebook group. As a result, I was flooded with criticism and harsh insults from many people.”

(E7, Participant P5)

This experience reflects strain originating from the perpetrator through public shaming and mockery, as the maliciously edited video distorted the participant’s message and portrayed her unfairly. By taking her words out of context and sharing them publicly, the perpetrator invited widespread ridicule and criticism, turning her into a target of online humiliation. This public attack damaged her reputation and caused emotional strain from being harshly judged and misunderstood by a large audience.

“I also make some effort in commenting on their posts frequently...At that time, maybe they felt annoyed by my actions, so they tried to make fun of me on the Internet.”

(E6, Participant P6)

This reflects strain originating from the perpetrator through public shaming and mockery, as the participant’s repeated attempts to connect were met with sarcastic and mocking replies in

public comment sections. Her actions, meant to show admiration, were turned into reasons to ridicule her in front of others, causing emotional hurt through deliberate public humiliation.

Sub-theme 2.5: Group and Repetitive Aggression

According to their responses, three out of six participants perceived strain originating from perpetrators by group and repetitive aggression. This refers to the psychological pressure victims face when they are targeted by multiple perpetrators or repeatedly harassed over time. The collective or ongoing nature of the aggression amplifies the strain, making victims feel overwhelmed.

“They just don't even care what reason gives and just attack you, and they even create an alternate account... using the bots to spam in the server to try to bring the server down.”

(E6, Participant P2)

This quote illustrates strain originating from the perpetrator through group and repetitive aggression, as the attackers continuously targeted the victim using multiple accounts and automated bots. Their coordinated efforts to overwhelm and sabotage the server reflect persistent, organized harassment, intensifying the victim's psychological strain through repeated exposure to collective hostility.

“They will post my photos on Facebook and make fun of my photos. Also, they created a Messenger group chat and added me into the group then sent something not friendly to me. I felt uncomfortable with people laughing at me, especially when they were making fun of my photos.”

(E6;E24, Participant P4)

This experience illustrates strain from group and repetitive aggression, as multiple perpetrators consistently targeted the participant by posting their photos publicly and mocking them. The creation of a Messenger group specifically to attack the victim shows coordinated group behaviour, while the repeated sharing and ridicule caused ongoing emotional discomfort, highlighting the sustained and collective nature of the cyberbullying.

“The most upsetting part would be I genuinely wanted to be friends with them and I really looked up to them, thinking that they are really cool and I wanted to be part of it. But it turns out I was being made fun of.” “I would say there are no specific messages or behaviours, but the accumulation of all these actions gradually caused me to feel upset.”

(E22;E30, Participant P6)

This reflects strain originating from the perpetrator through group and repetitive aggression, as the participant faced ongoing ridicule from multiple individuals she admired, not through one-off incidents, but through a pattern of consistent mockery and exclusion. The emotional impact built over time, as the collective and repeated behaviours of the group gradually wore her down, leading to lasting emotional distress.

Sub-theme 2.6: Betrayal

Based on their responses, two out of six participants perceived strain originating from perpetrators by betrayal. This refers to the emotional distress that arises when someone the victim trusted or cared about turns against them.

“When I tried to make friends with them but failed, I felt particularly upset. At first, I think there is a miscommunication or misunderstanding that has made them start cyberbullying.

So, instead of blaming them, I tried to communicate with them politely first...So, I felt disappointed when they did it again and again after I tried to communicate with them.”

(E14, Participant P2)

This quote reflects strain originating from perpetrator betrayal, as the participant’s genuine attempts to resolve the conflict through empathy and friendship were repeatedly rejected and exploited. The expectation of mutual understanding was broken, leading to deep disappointment and emotional strain caused by the breach of trust and rejection of goodwill.

“I was made to believe there is someone who really loves me but actually doesn't.”

(E6, Participant P3)

This statement reflects strain from betrayal, as the participant was led to believe the perpetrator genuinely loved her, only to realize it was a lie. The emotional investment and trust she placed in him were violated, causing deep psychological strain and feelings of deception, which intensified the impact of the cyberbullying.

Theme 3: Strain Originating from Significant Others

Sub-theme 3.1: Lack of Support and Invalidating Reactions

According to the responses, two out of six participants perceived strain originating from significant others by lacking of support and invalidating reactions. refers to the emotional strain victims experience when people they depend on—like friends, family, or peers—dismiss, minimize, or fail to acknowledge their pain. Instead of receiving empathy or help, victims feel ignored, judged, or misunderstood, which intensifies their isolation and emotional distress.

“One specific moment is when I told my friends about this incident and they just asked me to chill and said that it was just harassment, he would not share it.”

(E32, Participant P3)

This statement illustrates strain from significant others through lack of support and invalidating reactions. When the participant sought help from friends, their dismissive reaction (“just chill”) minimized her fear and distress, making her feel misunderstood and unsupported. This emotional invalidation added to her strain, deepening her sense of isolation during the cyberbullying experience.

"They became frustrated, complained, and even started to suspect that I was making it all up." "...my parents couldn't understand and gave me unhelpful advice like "turn off your phone" or "get a new phone." There was even one time when the perpetrator told me he was standing outside my door. I woke up scared and went to my dad for help. He got so angry and smashed my phone, saying I was being paranoid. What upset me the most was that the people around me couldn't understand or empathize with me; instead, they blamed me."

(E15, Participant P5)

This reflects strain originating from significant others through lack of support and invalidating reactions, as the participant's close circle—roommates and parents—failed to believe or empathize with her experience. Their scepticism, frustration, and dismissive advice made her feel blamed and isolated during a time when she needed understanding and reassurance. Instead of offering support, their reactions intensified her emotional distress, deepening her emotional strain.

Sub-theme 3.2: Witnessing Significant Others in Distress

Based on the responses, three out of six participants perceived strain originating from significant others by witnessing significant others in distress. refers to the emotional burden victims feel when they see someone they care about suffering as a result of the cyberbullying situation. Even if they are not the direct target, the distress of a loved one can cause guilt, helplessness, and emotional pain, adding to the overall strain.

“I felt scared for my friend because if that person could text me something like that, what would they do to the person that actually hurt them?”

(E107, Participant P1)

This quote reflects strain originating from a significant other by witnessing their distress indirectly, as the participant internalizes fear not just for herself but for her friend. Knowing the perpetrator targeted her so aggressively made her fear what worse harm could come to her friend—the actual target—creating emotional strain through empathy, worry, and a sense of shared danger.

“I think most of them are about my friend. As I mentioned just now, she has anxiety after this incident and has several times want to commit suicide...This is the most upsetting aspect for me. When my friend was being affected by cyberbullying, I could not do anything to help.”

(E12, Participant P2)

This quote reflects strain originating from significant others, as the participant experienced deep emotional distress from witnessing their close friend suffer severe anxiety and suicidal thoughts due to cyberbullying. The feeling of helplessness in being unable to alleviate their friend’s pain intensified the emotional burden, highlighting the strain caused by seeing a significant one in crisis.

"I also felt deeply upset for those who were affected, including my boyfriend and teammates."

(E16, Participant P5)

This reflects strain originating from significant others through witnessing their distress, as the participant experienced emotional pain not only from her own suffering but also from seeing her boyfriend and teammates impacted by the cyberbullying. Her boyfriend stepped in to defend her, only to become the next target of public attack and doxing. Knowing that her loved ones were targeted or hurt because of her intensifying her emotional burden. Her absence meant her teammates had to face difficult opponents without her, potentially affecting their performance and morale. This caused her to feel emotional strain from seeing her team suffer because of a situation she couldn't control.

Theme 4: Emotional Impacts

Sub-theme 4.1: Fear, Anxiety and Panic

Based on the responses, all six participants experienced emotional impacts of fear, anxiety and panic. This sub-theme captures participants' intense emotional responses to cyberbullying, including a persistent sense of fear of being watched, worry over future attacks, and panic during or after incidents.

"... then the perpetrator started telling me about my personal information, what they wanted to do, then it was fear and then anxiety. "

(E59, Participant P1)

This quote directly reflects emotional impacts such as fear, anxiety, and panic, as the participant's distress escalates when the perpetrator reveals her personal information along

with threats. The invasion of privacy combined with violent intentions triggers intense emotional reactions, showing how fear quickly turns into overwhelming anxiety.

“These emotions are because of my friend. Since this incident has affected her a lot, I am afraid that her condition will become worse.”

(E24, Participant P2)

This quote illustrates the emotional impacts of fear, anxiety, and panic, as the participant expresses constant worry about their friend’s deteriorating mental health. The fear that their friend's condition could worsen creates ongoing emotional tension, showing how concern for a friend’s well-being can trigger persistent anxiety and emotional instability.

“There is one of my friends had a similar incident with me. After this incident, everyone was boycotting her, which I do not think is fair because sometimes it is not what you wanted. So, it makes me more anxious because what if my videos and photos are being leaked. ”

(E40, Participant P3)

This statement highlights the emotional impacts of fear, anxiety, and panic experienced by the participant. Observing her friend being boycotted by others for a similar situation instilled a deep sense of fear that she, too, would face public humiliation and social rejection if her private images were ever exposed. Although she believed her friend didn’t deserve such treatment, the incident made her internalize the possible consequences of her own experience, triggering persistent anxiety.

"I felt scared because suddenly there were a lot of people posting and commenting about me, even adding me to a group chat to attack me. "

(E30, Participant P4)

This statement strongly reflects the emotional impacts of fear, anxiety, and panic. The participant describes feeling scared due to the sudden and overwhelming number of people posting and commenting about them, as well as being added to a group chat specifically created to attack them.

"It felt like the perpetrator was monitoring me 24/7, knowing every move I made...No matter where I was — at home or at university — he seemed to always know my whereabouts, which scared me."

(E21, Participant P5)

This experience reflects intense emotional impacts of fear, anxiety, and panic. Feeling like the perpetrator was monitoring the participant constantly created a sense of being trapped and unsafe, even in familiar environments like home or university. The unpredictability and perceived loss of privacy triggered constant fear, leading to heightened anxiety and paranoia.

"Before I realized it was cyberbullying, I was feeling anxious about how to reply to them so they would accept me as friends and let me join them." "After I realized it was cyberbullying, I felt anxious about how I could react and handle the situation..."

(E36, Participant P6)

These statements illustrate how the participant's anxiety evolved into a persistent emotional impact rooted in fear and panic. Initially, she felt anxious about gaining acceptance and belonging, constantly worrying about how to respond to avoid rejection. Once she realized she was being cyberbullied, that anxiety intensified into fear—fear of being ridiculed, further excluded, or emotionally harmed.

Sub-theme 4.2: Numbness

According to their experiences, three out of six participants reported experienced emotional impacts of numbness. This refers to the emotional desensitization that victims of cyberbullying may experience over time. After prolonged exposure to distressing situations, victims may begin to feel emotionally “numb”—that is, they stop feeling strong emotions like fear, sadness, or anger.

“I think my feelings went numb, not as strong as the previous time... as the incidents continued, I just thought that ‘Okay, here comes again.’”

(E24, Participant P2)

It reflects a gradual emotional desensitization due to repeated exposure to distressing incidents. Over time, the participant stops reacting as strongly, which is a common defense mechanism to cope with overwhelming or chronic stress.

“For a very long time, this incident hurt me and I will cry at midnight every day. But, after this, I just went numb as the incident continued.”

(E46, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the emotional impact of numbness as a response to prolonged distress. Initially overwhelmed by pain and sadness, the participant cried every night, but over time, the constant emotional strain led her to shut down emotionally.

“Over time, I began to accept it and even got used to being harassed in the middle of the night. I became numb to it.” “I gradually became numb and started getting used to that kind of life.”

(E18; E51, Participant P5)

The participant's statements illustrate the emotional impact of numbness, where prolonged exposure to stress and helplessness led the participant to emotionally shut down. Rather than continue to feel overwhelmed, she became desensitized to the harassment, accepting it as part of daily life.

Sub-theme 4.3: Depression and Sadness

Based on their responses, four out of six participants experienced depression and sadness. Refer to the deep emotional pain experienced by cyberbullying victims. This includes crying at night, feeling low for extended periods, and anticipating the worst, all of which are signs of depressive symptoms triggered by cyberbullying.

“I was depressed and cried a lot when I was worrying about the videos or photos getting leaked.”

(E54, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the emotional impacts of depression and sadness, as the participant experienced intense emotional distress driven by fear of her private images being leaked. Her frequent crying and persistent worry indicate depressive symptoms, showing how the threat of exposure deeply affected her mental health, leading to prolonged sadness and emotional suffering.

“After processing all of these things, I felt sad because they are saying something bad to me.”

(E30, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the emotional impacts of depression and sadness, as the participant expresses feeling deeply hurt after internalizing the repeated negative comments directed at

them. The emotional pain arose from being verbally attacked and devalued, leading to lingering sadness and a sense of emotional burden commonly associated with depressive experiences.

“The biggest emotion I felt during this incident was sadness, because I couldn’t continue with the debate competition...it affected the thing I loved most — debating — and caused harm to my teammates as well.”

(E19, Participant P5)

This reflects the emotional impacts of sadness and depression as she was forced to withdraw from something she was deeply passionate about — debating. Losing the chance to compete and feeling like she let down her teammates triggered deep regret, disappointment, and emotional pain. This sense of loss and hopelessness over something meaningful being taken away is a key indicator of depressive feelings.

“When I found out that there are some people that I don’t even know have blocked me on Facebook and the intensity of being made fun of were becoming higher, like they started spreading the rumors saying that I am weird and do not be friends with me, then I realized that it was cyberbullying.” “I felt sad and disappointed, but this was after I realized a few months later.”

(E24, Participant P6)

These statements show how the participant’s realization of being targeted—through being blocked by strangers and having rumors spread—led to deep feelings of sadness and disappointment. The delayed understanding intensified the emotional weight, reflecting the emotional impact of depression-like symptoms, such as feeling rejected, misunderstood, and emotionally hurt.

Sub-theme 4.3: Anger

According to participants' responses, three out of six participants experienced emotional impacts of anger during the incidents. This refers to the intense frustration and resentment victims feel as a result of being cyberbullied. This anger may grow over time, especially when victims realize they are unfairly targeted or misunderstood.

"...then it turned into anger. Because it was like none of my business, I was wondering why this is happening to me."

(E63, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the emotional impact of anger by showing how the participant, after experiencing prolonged fear and helplessness, began to feel frustrated and resentful for being unfairly targeted in a situation that wasn't their fault.

"At first, I also felt angry. I do not know why they have the right to judge me because they are the one who did something wrong so I was just doing my job to report to the disciplinary department. I did not do anything that is immoral."

(E34, Participant P4)

The participant's expression of anger in this statement illustrates the emotional impact of anger, particularly when stemming from perceived injustice. As a school prefect, the participant was fulfilling their duties by reporting students who violated school rules. However, instead of being respected for upholding discipline, he became the target of cyberbullying by peers who were angry about the consequences of their own actions. The participant's anger arises from this disconnect — he did nothing immoral, yet was harshly judged and attacked by others.

“At first, I was angry and wanted to find out who was behind it.” “In the beginning, I had a short temper and little patience. When the bullying first started...my immediate thought was to fight back — I didn’t want to just stay silent and endure it.”

(E18; E39, Participant P5)

These illustrate the emotional impact of anger, which was one of her initial and strongest reactions to the cyberbullying. Being targeted without knowing who the perpetrator was made her feel violated and powerless, leading to intense frustration. Her immediate emotional response was not to remain passive but to fight back and reclaim control over the situation. She described having a short temper and little patience, indicating how the bullying disrupted her emotional stability. The persistent intrusions and inability to stop the harassment fuelled her sense of injustice and helplessness, which manifested as anger.

Sub-theme 4.4: Guilt

According to their experiences, three out of six participants experienced emotional impacts of guilt. This refers to the regret victims feel after experiencing cyberbullying. They may feel responsible for the situation, for losing friendships, or for not speaking up sooner.

“I felt guilty and also a lot of regret. Because I lost a lot of years of contact with them... during that time it was a big issue for me.”

(E97, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the emotional impact of guilt as the participant expresses remorse for distancing themselves from friends during the cyberbullying period. They regret losing valuable relationships and not communicating the real reason behind their withdrawal. The

guilt arises from feeling responsible for the misunderstanding and the lost time with people they cared about.

“I felt regret because I should not send him my photos in the first place.”

(E30, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the emotional impact of guilt in the participant’s experience, as she internalized blame for the cyberbullying incident by regretting her decision to send intimate photos. Rather than focusing solely on the perpetrator’s manipulative and coercive actions, she turned the blame inward, believing that her own choices led to the situation. This sense of guilt added a layer of emotional burden, making her feel responsible for the threats and emotional trauma that followed.

“...I couldn’t continue with the debate competition. I had to let my juniors take my place to face the tough opponents. I felt regretful, but there was nothing I could do. I just couldn’t handle all the eyes on me in such a tense situation. It felt like the whole world was waiting for me to fail, so I chose to back out. “

(E19, Participant P5)

This reflects the emotional impact of guilt, as participant felt she had let others down by withdrawing from the debate competition. Letting her juniors take her place and being unable to perform under pressure left her with regret and a sense of personal failure.

Sub-theme 4.5: Helplessness

According to participants’ responses, four out of six participants experienced emotional impacts of helplessness. This refers to the feeling of having no control or way to stop the cyberbullying. Victims may feel powerless, vulnerable, and unable to protect themselves.

“The most upsetting was that I felt very helpless. It was like, I couldn’t go anywhere. So, I stayed at home for a lot of time. And, I felt like I couldn’t do anything about it. So, I could only live in fear.”

(E43, Participant P1)

This statement clearly illustrates the emotional impact of helplessness as the participant describes a deep sense of powerlessness and lack of control over the situation. Their emotional and physical response—staying at home, feeling unable to go anywhere, and living in fear—demonstrates how the situation took away their sense of control and safety.

“First, I felt shocked and helpless, and did not know what to do. It was the first time I have experienced being treated maliciously.”

(E18, Participant P2)

This quote relates to emotional impact of helplessness because it expresses a loss of control and uncertainty in response to a negative experience. The participant explicitly mentions feeling "helpless" and "did not know what to do," which are clear indicators of helplessness—an emotional state where one feels incapable of acting or changing the situation.

“Feeling helpless is because I tried to tell someone, but it cannot change the reality that I have already sent the videos and photos. At that time still not invented the “unsend” button. Even after I told my friends, they will just ask me to be chill, making me feel more helpless and not being understood. ”

(E43, Participant P3)

This statement clearly reflects the emotional impact of helplessness in the participant's situation, stemming from both her actions and the responses of others. She expresses a deep sense of powerlessness over what had already happened—specifically, having sent the videos and photos—emphasizing that nothing she did afterward could undo it. This irreversible act left her feeling trapped in the consequences, unable to regain control over the situation. Her feelings of helplessness were further intensified by the invalidating responses she received from friends, who minimized her distress by simply telling her to “be chill.” These dismissive reactions made her feel unheard and unsupported, reinforcing her perception that no one truly understood the gravity of what she was going through.

"...the strongest emotion I felt was helplessness. I didn't know how to solve the situation, and even now, I still don't know who the bully is. I tried many different ways to resolve it. I attempted to negotiate with the bully, which only made others think I was having a mental breakdown" "I felt helpless and didn't know how to explain things in a way that would make them believe me."

(E18; E6, Participant P5)

This clearly reflects the emotional impact of helplessness experienced by the participant throughout the cyberbullying incidents. Despite her continuous efforts to stop the harassment—such as changing passwords, creating new accounts, and even attempting to negotiate directly with the perpetrator—nothing worked. The perpetrator persisted, and she was unable to identify or confront them, which intensified her feelings of being powerless. Her attempt to reason with the bully backfired, as others misinterpreted her actions and began to question her mental stability. This misunderstanding further deepened her helplessness, as she struggled not only to stop the abuse but also to be believed and understood by those

around her. She was trapped in a situation where she had no control over the attacks, no support from people she trusted, and no effective solution in sight.

Theme 5: Behavioural Impacts

Sub-theme 5.1: Social Withdrawal and Isolation

Based on participants' responses, all six of them experienced behavioural impacts of social withdrawal and isolation. This refers to noticeable changes in how victims of cyberbullying interact with others, often leading them to distance themselves from social environments.

“I stopped going out, because I know that he has people in my school that can give him my information.” “My social circle became very, very, very small and close friends that I used to have, I stopped talking to them.”

(E73, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the behavioural impacts of social withdrawal and isolation as a response to the fear and anxiety caused by cyberbullying. Participant P1 describes intentionally avoiding social settings and cutting off contact with others due to the perceived threat that the perpetrator could still access their personal information through people at school. This fear led them to drastically reduce their interactions, shrinking their social circle to only a few individuals they felt they could trust. By choosing not to go out and distancing themselves even from previously close friends, the participant demonstrates a significant behavioural change driven by the need for self-protection.

“I will think that since I grew up, I did not go along with friends anymore and tend to live alone and stay with myself. But now, after reflecting on this incident, I think that I have

brought some of the ways that I survived in the online settings to reality. I did not make a lot of friends in reality.”

(E42, Participant P2)

This quote reflects the behavioural impact of social withdrawal and isolation, as the participant describes how her experience with cyberbullying led to a noticeable change in how she engages with others in real life. Although she initially believed her growing distance from friends was simply a part of becoming more mature, she later recognized that the way she interacted with others online had started to shape her offline behaviour. After facing repeated hostility and mistreatment in the online environment, she began to limit her social interactions in reality, choosing not to make many new friends and instead keeping to herself.

“I would not share too much with others as before and become more introverted...sometimes you talk to them then they seem like they do not care about it...I will be afraid that if I share more, what if the person may whisper and spread it around.”

(E62;E68, Participant P3)

These statements reflect the behavioural impacts of social withdrawal and isolation, which developed as a protective response to the participant’s experience of cyberbullying and the emotional harm that followed. After feeling invalidated and dismissed by those she confided in—who seemed not to care or take her seriously—she began to withdraw from social interactions, becoming more introverted and guarded.

“I didn't even go outside with my family members because I was scared to be recognized...”
“I became more introverted... I do not dare to make friends... my social circle is small with just a few friends.”

(E24;E36, Participant P4)

These statements reflect the behavioural impacts of social withdrawal and isolation experienced by the participant as a direct result of the cyberbullying. The fear of being recognized and judged by others led the participant to avoid going out in public, even with close family members, which shows a significant disruption in their normal social routines. Additionally, the participant became more introverted, no longer feeling safe or confident in forming new friendships. The negative attention and ridicule they received caused them to question how others perceived them, leading to a shrinking of their social circle and reluctance to engage with peers.

"I avoided appearing in the debate competition and not attending any of it anymore."

(E25, Participant P5)

This statement reflects the behavioural impacts of social withdrawal and isolation resulting from the cyberbullying experience. After being publicly humiliated and harshly criticized due to the maliciously edited debate video, she chose to completely withdraw from debate competitions—something that had previously been a significant and meaningful part of her life. The emotional distress, fear of judgment, and intense pressure made her feel too exposed and vulnerable to continue participating. This avoidance behaviour wasn't limited to the event itself; it symbolized her retreat from social and public environments where she once thrived.

"I would sense that there is a distance even between my close friends. I won't actively approach my secondary school close friend. I think it is getting better now, but sometimes it will reappear again and I do not know why."

(E59, Participant P6)

This statement reflects the behavioural impact of social withdrawal and isolation resulting from the participant's experience of cyberbullying. Even after the incident had passed, she

continued to feel a sense of emotional and relational distance, not only from acquaintances but even from her close friends. This ongoing reluctance to actively approach others, including those she previously felt comfortable with, indicates a lasting behavioural change shaped.

Sub-theme 5.2: Online Disengagement and Avoidance

According to their experiences, five out of six participants experienced behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance. The behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance describe how participants intentionally reduce or cease their online activities to protect themselves from further cyberbullied by perpetrators.

“I stopped posting on social media. I deleted a lot of things from my Facebook account... even Instagram, everything, I stopped posting.”

(E73, Participant P1)

This statement illustrates the behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance as a direct result of the cyberbullying experience. The participant describes completely withdrawing from social media by deleting posts and personal information from platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Her actions indicate an attempt to erase her digital presence, limiting access to her personal life and reducing visibility to others online.

“I have deleted the Facebook app and even my Facebook account... I do not play Tinder anymore after this.”

(E48, Participant P3)

This statement illustrates the behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance as a direct response to the trauma the participant experienced through cyberbullying. Her

decision to delete the Facebook app and permanently close her account, along with stopping the use of Tinder, signifies a conscious effort to distance herself from the digital spaces where the abuse occurred.

"I reduced my frequency of posting online at that time because I was afraid of being judged by them."

(E38, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance, as the participant deliberately reduced their presence on social media due to fear of judgment and further harassment. This led him to withdraw from online activities that previously have been normal or enjoyable.

"For online platform...I avoided using it because they said something bad to me and were attacking me...But, after this I still can use the online platform but will be noticing myself to be more cautious."

(E25, Participant P5)

This reflects the behavioural impacts of online disengagement and avoidance brought on by the cyberbullying experience. Initially, the constant attacks, hateful comments, and personal threats caused her to avoid using online platforms altogether. Moreover, her boyfriend have stopped her to use it to avoid further emotional hurt. She felt unsafe engaging online due to the fear of being targeted again, which led her to withdraw from digital spaces where the bullying took place. Even after the peak of the harassment passed, her behaviour online was permanently altered—she becoming cautious of how she presented herself.

“I did not post anything again online because I was afraid that there would be someone who would screenshot and talk about me...”

“I stop commenting on others’ posts as before. It is because I am afraid that they will think I am annoying...”

(E40;E44, Participant P6)

These statements clearly illustrate the behavioural impact of online disengagement and avoidance as a result of the participant's cyberbullying experience. Her decision to stop posting content and commenting on others' posts was driven by an ongoing fear of being targeted, ridiculed, or misinterpreted online. This shift reflects a conscious effort to minimize her visibility in digital spaces, avoiding any actions that could potentially expose her to further criticism or social harm. Such behaviour marks a significant change in how she navigates social media, moving from open and expressive participation to silence and invisibility.

Sub-theme 5.3: Change in Communication Style

According to their responses, four out of six participants experienced behavioural impacts of change in communication style. The behavioural impacts of change in communication style reflect how cyberbullying alters the way participants interact with others, both online and in person.

“I used to be very outgoing and very friendly to everyone. But after that, I became very reserved and more introverted than I really was... I don't share a lot of my thoughts or even information to people that I feel like it's not necessary to.”

(E87; E79, Participant P1)

This statement highlights the behavioural impacts of a change in communication style following the cyberbullying experience. The participant reflects on a noticeable transformation in how she interacts with others—shifting from being outgoing and friendly to becoming reserved and introverted. Her decision to limit how much she shares, even with people she knows, reveals a heightened sense of caution and a reluctance to open up.

“I am not as friendly as before. On the internet, I am not as talkative and friendly as I am in reality. I talk less because I do not want anyone to find the chance to attack me.”

(E30, Participant P2)

This quote illustrates the behavioural impact of a change in communication style, as the participant describes a significant shift in how she interacts with others online after experiencing cyberbullying. Before the incident, she was more open, friendly, and talkative in online spaces, engaging actively and building relationships with server members. However, the continuous exposure to harassment, betrayal, and personal attacks caused her to become more guarded. She now speaks less and intentionally limits her friendliness to avoid giving others a reason or opportunity to target her.

“I would be more cautious when communicating with others. Also, I would not be as friendly as before.”

(E62, Participant P3)

The statement reflects a behavioural impact of change in communication style, as the participant described noticeable differences in how she interacts with others after experiencing cyberbullying. This shows that she no longer communicates with the same openness or warmth as she did previously. Her communication style has shifted from being friendly and engaging to being brief, cautious, and distant.

"when interacting with others, I constantly remind myself to be cautious, to not share everything with people." "I started feeling like people were always observing me, which made me very conscious of my words and actions, always trying to be extra careful."

(E25; E27, Participant P5)

This illustrates the behavioural impacts of a change in communication style resulting from the cyberbullying experience. After being targeted and betrayed, the participant developed a persistent sense of being watched and judged by others. This heightened self-awareness made her significantly alter how she interacted with people. She became guarded in conversations, avoiding open expression and deliberately withholding personal information. This incident leading her to a more reserved and defensive communication style.

Sub-theme 5.4: Changes in Life Choices

Based on participants' experiences, two out of six participants experienced behavioural impacts of change in life choices. The behavioural impacts of changes in life choices refer to the significant decisions participants made in response to their experiences with cyberbullying, which altered their daily routines, future plans, or social involvement.

"The controversy caused by it was so intense that I decided to back out and quit the competition because I didn't know how to face it and couldn't bring myself to prepare for the match. The hardest part was missing out on a rare opportunity for a university competition."

"I avoided appearing in the debate competition and not attending any of it anymore."

(E17; E25, Participant P5)

These statements highlight the behavioural impact of changes in life choices resulting from the emotional toll of a distressing cyberbullying incident. The participant chose to withdraw

from a significant university-level debate competition, a rare and valuable opportunity, due to the intense controversy and pressure surrounding the situation. What began as an emotional struggle evolved into a concrete decision that altered her personal trajectory.

“As I mentioned before, girls in my primary school can straight up go to the secondary school under the same organization without looking at the results. At first, I intended to go to this secondary school. However, this incident became the major reason that I gave up going to this secondary school because I did not want to meet them again.”

(E32, Participant P6)

This statement demonstrates a clear behavioural impact of changes in life choices driven by the participant’s experience with cyberbullying. Although she initially planned to continue her education at a secondary school affiliated with her primary school—a transition that would have been natural and straightforward—she ultimately decided against it solely because the perpetrators of the bullying would also be attending that school. Her avoidance of the environment where the bullying took place indicates how the experience profoundly influenced her decision-making process, overriding academic or practical considerations. The fear of encountering those who had harmed her online translated into a significant real-world decision that altered her educational path.

Theme 6: Relationship Impacts

Sub-theme 6.1: Friendship Breakdown

According to their responses, five out of six participants experienced friendship breakdown. The relationship impacts of friendship breakdown were evident in the way participants described a clear and lasting disconnection from their peers following their experiences of cyberbullying.

“There are only two friends that I stopped talking to during that time... They were very confused and thought that I hated them... So, they also stop talking to me.”

(E92, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the relationship impacts of friendship breakdown as a consequence of the participant's experience with cyberbullying. During the period of distress, she chose to withdraw and stop communicating with her friends—not out of hostility, but out of fear and emotional overwhelm. However, this sudden silence led to misunderstandings, as her friends interpreted her withdrawal as rejection or animosity. As a result, they too stopped reaching out, believing that she no longer valued the friendship. This mutual disconnection led to the breakdown of once-close relationships.

“I did not contact them anymore... I am afraid that they will take advantage of me as admin.”

(E38, Participant P2)

This quote demonstrates the relationship impact of friendship breakdown, as the participant describes how her connections with former friends deteriorated following the cyberbullying incident. Previously, she had formed friendships through the Discord server, but after experiencing repeated violations of trust and witnessing how some individuals exploited their relationships to avoid consequences, she chose to sever those ties. Her fear that these friends might take advantage of her position as an admin—such as requesting favours or asking her to reverse disciplinary actions—led her to stop communicating with them entirely.

“For friends, sometimes you talk to them then they seem like they do not care about it. So, I am wondering why I need to continue talking to the person.”

(E68, Participant P3)

This situation reflects the relationship impact of friendship breakdown, where the participant experienced emotional detachment and growing distance from her friends after the cyberbullying incident. When she attempted to talk to them about her experience, their lack of care and supportive response led her to question the purpose of maintaining those friendships. This lack of empathy and understanding leading to the weakening of those friendships.

“There are some friends that have changed after this incident. Because they have other friends who dislike me, they just choose to leave me and do not make friends with me anymore. ”

(E44, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the relationship impacts of friendship breakdown in the participant's experience. The participant reported that some friends changed their behaviour after the cyberbullying incident. These friends chose to distance themselves and stopped maintaining the friendship. The participant explained that this occurred because those friends had connections with others who disliked the participant. As a result, they sided with their mutual peers and ended their friendship with the participant.

"When the bullying first started, my roommates didn't understand what was happening — some even began to suspect that I had a split personality or that I was faking everything. I felt deeply disappointed and confused, wondering why even the people closest to me would think that way...I also stopped talking about it with my roommates. "

(E30; E34, Participant P5)

These statements indicate the relationship impacts of friendship breakdown as experienced by the participant during the cyberbullying incidents. When the harassment began, her roommates initially showed concern, but as the situation continued and became more complex, they began to doubt her credibility. Some suspected that she had a split personality or was fabricating the events entirely. The lack of belief and support from her immediate social circle created emotional distance. As a result, she stopped discussing the incident with her roommates altogether.

Sub-theme 6.2: Changes in Family Dynamics

According to their experiences, two out of six participants reported changes in family dynamic. The relationship impacts of changes in family dynamics describe the ways in which cyberbullying experiences affected how participants interacted with and related to their family members.

"The relationship with my family members have become closer after the incident. At that time, my mother noticed my emotional changes and asked me about what was happening. So, I just told them about the incidents and we became closer."

(E45, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the relationship impacts of changes in family dynamics. The participant reported that their relationship with family, especially their mother, became closer after the incident. The mother noticed emotional changes, asked about the situation, and the participant shared the experience, which led to increased emotional closeness and stronger family support.

"...my mother failed to understand me and even blamed me for it...my father even smashed my phone, thinking I was just being paranoid." "After realizing I couldn't expect understanding, comfort, or practical support from them, I began to only share good news and keep the bad to myself."

(E37; E31; E34, Participant P5)

These statements reflect the relationship impacts of changes in family dynamics during the victim's experience with cyberbullying. When she sought help from her parents, her mother did not understand her situation and instead placed blame on her. Her father, in a moment of frustration, smashed her phone, believing she was overreacting or being paranoid. Over time, she decided to withhold her struggles and negative experiences, choosing to only share positive updates. This marked a shift in the way she interacted with her family, moving from open communication to emotional distancing. The dynamic changed from one where she may have previously sought support, to one where she no longer expected it, altering the overall nature of her relationship with her parents.

Sub-theme 6.3: Trust Issues

According to the participants, six of them experienced relationship impacts of trust issues. The relationship impacts of trust issues highlight how cyberbullying experiences disrupted participants' ability to feel secure and open in their relationships with others.

"I became very careful and felt I had a very big struggle towards talking to people or opening up to people."

(E101, Participant P1)

This statement demonstrates the relationship impacts of trust issues that developed as a result of the cyberbullying experience. The participant shares that she became extremely cautious

and found it difficult to talk to others or open up. After being targeted and threatened, especially with the knowledge that the perpetrator may have connections within her school, she began to question who could be trusted. This fear of her personal information being misused or shared led to a significant shift in how she approached relationships. Even with people she once felt close to, she struggled to maintain openness and connection, choosing instead to emotionally distance herself.

“We found it was difficult to trust people. In reality, we can have the instinct to know if the person is good or bad by observation. However, online, we will not know who the person will harm us.”

(E30, Participant P2)

This quote reflects the relationship impact of trust issues, as the participant expresses a deep sense of uncertainty and caution when interacting with others, particularly in online environments. Her experience with cyberbullying led her to realize that, unlike in real life where body language and behaviour can provide cues about someone's intentions, the online world lacks those signals—making it nearly impossible to judge who might cause harm. The repeated incidents of betrayal, harassment, and manipulation from people she initially trusted have significantly damaged her ability to believe in the goodwill of others.

“I become more careful with how I speak to a person, especially to those who are just met. It is because they might use it against you.”

(E76, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the relationship impact of trust issues, as the participant described becoming more guarded in her interactions, especially with new people. Her experience of being deceived and manipulated by someone she initially trusted led her to develop a

heightened sense of caution in future relationships. She became more selective with her words and less open in communication, driven by the fear that what she shares might later be used against her.

"Since I cannot exactly know how a person feels about me. They may still be able to talk to you but they can also dislike you at the same time. So, I found it hard to trust people."

(E51, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the relationship impacts of trust issues experienced by the participant after the cyberbullying incident. The participant reported difficulty in trusting others, explaining that people may appear friendly in conversation but still secretly dislike them. This uncertainty about others' true feelings led the participant to question the sincerity of social interactions. As a result, the participant developed a general sense of mistrust toward peers.

"This incident caused a breakdown of trust between me and my roommates... Once they stopped trusting me, I found it hard to trust them too."

(E36, Participant P5)

These statements reflect the relationship impacts of changes in trust issues between the participant and her roommates during the cyberbullying incident. As the situation progressed, her roommates began to doubt her explanations and questioned the reality of what she was experiencing. Their loss of trust in her made her feel isolated and unsupported. In response, she also found it difficult to trust them, feeling hurt by their disbelief.

“I will be more careful who I befriend. I carefully select the circle of friends. When I sense that someone dislikes me or is not sincere enough to become my friend, then I will just walk away. I think that this is unhealthy. But, I do not want to get hurt anymore.”

(E59, Participant P6)

This statement reflects the relationship impact of trust issues that developed as a result of the participant's past experience with cyberbullying. Having been hurt by individuals she once admired and attempted to befriend, she now approaches social relationships with heightened caution and emotional distance. Her tendency to carefully select friends and to withdraw at the slightest sense of insincerity or dislike reveals a deep-rooted difficulty in trusting others.

Theme 7: Cognitive Impacts

Sub-theme 7.1: Hypervigilance and Overthinking

According to participants' experiences, four out of six participants experienced cognitive impacts of hypervigilance and overthinking. This refers to the persistent mental alertness and repetitive thought patterns experienced by participants following cyberbullying incidents.

“Yes, like I mentioned, he texts me at night. So when the frequency started getting less and less, I was expecting a text at every night. It's like, I am thinking about ‘when is the text coming in?’ So, I couldn't sleep because I was waiting for that text.”

(E69, Participant P1)

This statement illustrates the cognitive impacts of hypervigilance and overthinking that the participant experienced as a result of the cyberbullying. Even when the threatening messages began to decrease in frequency, her mind remained on high alert, constantly anticipating another message. This state of hypervigilance caused her to become mentally fixated on the possibility of further threats, leading to disrupted sleep and ongoing psychological stress. Her

thoughts were consumed by the fear of “when is the text coming in,” showing a persistent cycle of overthinking and anxiety, even in the absence of immediate danger.

“Any notification from Facebook, my first thought was wondering if the perpetrator is texting me again.”

(E36, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the cognitive impacts of hypervigilance and overthinking, as the participant described a persistent mental state of alertness and anxiety triggered by seemingly ordinary events, such as receiving notifications from Facebook. Her immediate thought that the perpetrator might be contacting her again shows how the cyberbullying experience conditioned her to anticipate danger or threats in routine digital interactions. This constant anticipation of harm indicates hypervigilance, where her mind remained in a heightened state of awareness, unable to relax or feel safe online.

“I constantly felt anxious and paranoid, like someone was stalking me or that everyone’s eyes were on me. I became obsessed with checking how others viewed me.”

(E27, Participant P5)

These statements indicate the cognitive impacts of hypervigilance and overthinking experienced by the participant during the cyberbullying incident. She reported feeling constant anxiety and paranoia, with a persistent fear that someone was stalking her or watching her every move. This led her to become highly self-conscious and overly alert to her surroundings. She became preoccupied with how others perceived her, frequently checking and analysing their reactions.

"I became very cautious and vigilant when I made or added friends with someone. I was afraid that I would add or make friends with someone who is their friend so they could talk about me again."

(E40, Participant P6)

This statement clearly illustrates the cognitive impact of hypervigilance and overthinking that emerged as a consequence of the participant's cyberbullying experience. Her increased caution and constant mental filtering when forming new connections reflect a heightened state of alertness—always assessing potential threats. This goes beyond typical caution; it suggests a continuous mental loop of analyzing, anticipating, and worrying about potential harm.

Sub-theme 7.2: Negative self-appraisal

Based on the response, three out of six participants experienced negative self-appraisal. The cognitive impacts of negative self-appraisal refer to the patterns of critical and self-degrading thoughts that participants developed as a result of their cyberbullying experiences. Several individuals reported frequently thinking of themselves in a negative light, using harsh labels or questioning their own character, intelligence, or social value.

"At first, when there are just several people involved in cyberbullying, we strongly believe that we are doing the right things. However, when the perpetrators become more and more, we start to wonder if it is our fault, are our rules too strict?"

(E16, Participant P2)

This quote highlights the cognitive impact of negative self-appraisal, as the participant begins to question the validity and fairness of her actions in response to the growing cyberbullying. Initially confident that they were managing the server appropriately by enforcing clear rules,

the participant's mindset began to shift as the attacks increased. Instead of continuing to assert that the rules were necessary for maintaining a safe and respectful environment, she and her co-admin started to internalize the perpetrators' backlash, wondering if they were at fault or if their standards were too harsh. This self-questioning reflects a form of negative self-appraisal, where the individual begins to doubt their decisions, abilities, or sense of right and wrong, despite the lack of evidence that they did anything wrong.

"I will wonder if I am worthy to be helped by them. Because I am the one who chooses to send the videos and photos to the perpetrator."

(E44, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the cognitive impact of negative self-appraisal, as the participant evaluates her own actions in a highly critical manner, questioning whether she deserves help from others. Her thought process shows a tendency to assess her worth based on past behavior, particularly her decision to send the videos and photos. This form of self-appraisal involves a mental judgment that associates her value with the choices she made, leading to doubts about her entitlement to support.

"I began overanalyzing everything, blaming myself, and questioning my own personality or character. I kept wondering why something like this happened to me and whether I was somehow annoying enough for someone to treat me this way"

(E53, Participant P5)

These statements demonstrate the cognitive impacts of negative self-appraisal as experienced by the participant during the cyberbullying incidents. She described engaging in constant overanalysis of her own behavior, thoughts, and personality. She questioned aspects of her identity, such as whether her character or the way she presented herself had contributed to

being targeted. This reflects a pattern of self-evaluation that became critical and overly negative.

Theme 8: Physical Impacts

Sub-theme 8.1: Sleep Disturbance

According to participants' experiences, three out of six participants reported experienced sleep disturbance. The physical impacts of sleep disturbance refer to the difficulties participants faced in maintaining regular, restful sleep

"Also, I couldn't eat and sleep...after the cyberbullying event died down and after months went by, the physical symptoms stopped. "

(E89; E91, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the physical impacts of sleep disturbance experienced by the participant as a direct result of the cyberbullying. She describes being unable to sleep during the period when she was receiving threatening messages, indicating how the emotional and psychological distress manifested in disrupted physical functioning. The fact that these symptoms gradually disappeared only after the cyberbullying stopped and months had passed further highlights the connection between the trauma and her sleep difficulties.

"I will think about a lot of things... and it led me to trouble sleeping for a few months. "

(E64, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the physical impact of sleep disturbance, as the participant experienced difficulty sleeping for several months due to excessive thinking and mental

preoccupation related to the cyberbullying incident. Her mind was constantly active, filled with worries and thoughts that disrupted her ability to rest, leading to prolonged sleep issues.

"For about two years, I often experienced insomnia due to anxiety. Even when I managed to fall asleep, I would frequently wake up in fear."

(E26, Participant P5)

This statement reflects the physical impacts of sleep disturbance experienced by the participant during the cyberbullying incident. She reported suffering from insomnia for approximately two years, caused by ongoing anxiety. Even when she was able to fall asleep, she frequently woke up in fear, indicating that her sleep was disrupted and restless. These sleep difficulties were a prolonged issue and directly linked to the psychological distress she experienced during the harassment.

Sub-theme 8.2: Appetite Issues

According to their responses, three out of six participants reported appetite issues. The physical impacts of appetite issues describe how participants' eating habits and physical responses to food were affected during and after their experiences of cyberbullying.

"If I ate something, even just one bite, I would want to vomit."

(E89, Participant P1)

The participant experienced appetite issues during the cyberbullying period. She stated that if she ate something, even just one bite, she would feel like vomiting. This shows a clear disruption in her eating habits linked to the distress she was experiencing.

“Stop eating for two weeks...because I was too sad until no mood to eat...I started to feel faint and hand shaking when holding a pen, even writing is a hard thing for me... I just started eating.”

(E102, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the physical impact of appetite issues, as the participant experienced a significant loss of appetite due to intense sadness, leading her to stop eating for two weeks. Her emotional state directly affected her physical health and functioning, resulting in symptoms such as faintness, hand tremors, and difficulty performing basic tasks like writing.

“My appetite was also affected, especially in the early stages of the incident. I often lost interest in food and couldn’t eat properly because of my low mood.”

(E28, Participant P5)

This statement reflects the physical impacts of appetite issues experienced by the victim during the early stages of the cyberbullying incident. She reported a noticeable loss of interest in food and difficulty eating properly, which she attributed to her low mood. The emotional distress she was facing directly affected her eating habits, resulting in disrupted appetite and reduced food intake.

Sub-theme 8.3: Stress-Related Physical Symptoms

Based on their experiences, three out of six participants experienced stress-related physical symptoms. The physical impacts of stress-related physical symptoms refer to the bodily responses participants experienced, such as frequent headaches, stomach pain, nausea, body aches, and visual disturbances.

"Yeah, I had headaches almost every hour. If I wasn't doing anything, I would have headaches. And if I'm doing something, even my eyes would feel very strange and feel like my eyes would burst."

(E89, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the physical impacts of stress-related physical symptoms. The participant reported experiencing frequent headaches—almost every hour—and eye discomfort, describing a sensation as if her eyes would burst. These symptoms occurred both during activity and rest, indicating continuous physical strain likely related to emotional distress during the cyberbullying period.

"Body pain without knowing the reason."

(E66, Participant P3)

The statement reflects the physical impact of stress-related physical symptoms. The participant reported experiencing body pain without knowing the reason.

"The lack of sleep gave me frequent headaches, making it difficult to focus in class."

"Eventually, the poor appetite also led to stomach pain."

(E28, Participant P5)

These statements show the physical impacts of stress-related symptoms during the cyberbullying incident. The victim experienced frequent headaches from lack of sleep, which made it hard to focus in class. She also developed stomach pain due to prolonged poor appetite. These symptoms were direct physical responses to the emotional stress she was under.

Theme 9: Adaptive Coping

Sub-theme 9.1: Emotional Expression & Release

According to participants' responses, three out of six participants used adaptive coping by emotional expression and release. Adaptive coping through emotional expression and release refers to constructive strategies that allow individuals to externalize and process overwhelming emotions in response to cyberbullying.

"I just started drawing and journaling...I don't think it was helpful for managing my emotions, but I could see physically what was happening."

(E111; E113, Participant P1)

This statement reflects the use of adaptive coping through emotional expression and release in the form of drawing and journaling. In response to the emotional strain caused by cyberbullying, the participant began to engage in creative outlets as a way to externalize her feelings. Although she noted that these activities did not necessarily help her manage or reduce the intensity of her emotions, they served as a means for her to visualize and process her inner turmoil. The fact that she could "see physically what was happening" through her drawings suggests that these coping strategies allowed her to express emotions that she found difficult to articulate verbally. While the effectiveness in emotional relief may have been limited for her, these actions still demonstrate an effort to cope constructively with distress.

"I joined co-curricular activities like sports. I feel more relieved in a sense... it feels like releasing all the anger."

(E86, Participant P3)

The statement reflects the adaptive coping of emotional expression and release, as the participant engaged in co-curricular activities like sports to manage the emotional aftermath

of the cyberbullying incident. She described the experience as a way to release anger, indicating that physical activity served as an outlet for expressing difficult emotions in a constructive manner.

"I mostly coped by listening to music and letting everything out through a good cry. After crying, I'd usually feel more clear-headed and rational."

(E48, Participant P5)

This statement reflects the adaptive coping of emotional expression and release used by the participant during the cyberbullying incident. She explained that she often listened to music and allowed herself to cry as a way to manage her emotional distress. Crying served as a form of emotional release, helping her process the overwhelming feelings she experienced. She noted that after expressing her emotions through crying, she typically felt more clear-headed and rational, which allowed her to think more calmly about the situation.

Sub-theme 9.2: Problem-Focused Coping

According to participants' responses, four out of six participants used adaptive coping through problem-focusing strategies. Adaptive coping through problem-focused coping refers to deliberate actions taken to directly address, reduce, or eliminate the source of stress—in this case, the cyberbullying itself.

"Since the perpetrators were banned and kicked out from our server, they found that they cannot do anything to us on Discord." "We have reported all the accounts on Discord and written a letter to Discord to complain about it."

(E8, Participant P2)

These statements reflect the adaptive coping strategy of problem-focused coping, as the participant actively sought to reduce the cyberbullying by utilizing the tools and procedures available to her. After identifying that the perpetrators were using Discord as the main platform for harassment, she and her team took decisive action by banning and kicking them out of the server—effectively cutting off their access and limiting their ability to continue the attacks within that space. Recognizing that the bans alone were not enough due to the use of alternative accounts, they escalated their efforts by formally reporting the perpetrators and writing a complaint letter to Discord.

“I deleted and blocked the perpetrator on Facebook...he did not reach out to me anymore after this.”

(E48; E50, Participant P3)

The statement reflects the adaptive coping of problem-focused coping, as the participant took direct action to manage the source of distress by deleting and blocking the perpetrator on Facebook. This approach involved addressing the problem at its root—cutting off communication and access.

“ I felt angry and took screenshots of what the perpetrators had done and reported it to the teacher. But this method did not really work and made it more intense and more people disliked me...I think it has reduced because some of them may be afraid of being punished by teacher. ”

(E53; E55, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the adaptive coping strategy of problem-focused coping used by the participant in response to the cyberbullying. The participant took direct action by capturing screenshots of the perpetrators' online behavior and reporting the incident to a teacher. This

approach indicates an attempt to address the source of the problem through formal channels. However, the participant reported that the outcome was not fully effective, as the situation initially intensified and led to increased negative attention from others. Despite this, the participant noted that the cyberbullying eventually reduced, which they attributed to some perpetrators possibly fearing punishment from the teacher.

“Eventually I deleted and blocked them and never chatted with them again... When my feelings of anxiety and fear reached a certain point, I just decided to unfriend, block and delete all of them at once.”

(E34; E57, Participant P6)

These statements exemplify the adaptive coping strategy of problem-focused coping in the participant’s response to cyberbullying. Faced with ongoing emotional distress—particularly fear and anxiety—she eventually took deliberate action to eliminate the source of harm by blocking, unfriending, and cutting off all communication with the perpetrators. This decision reflects a shift from passive endurance to active problem-solving, where she chose to directly address and remove the external triggers contributing to her distress.

Sub-theme 9.3: Social Support

Based on their responses, all six participants receiving social support from others. Adaptive coping through social support refers to the process of relying on meaningful interpersonal relationships to manage stress and emotional distress caused by adverse experiences like cyberbullying. This coping mechanism involves seeking empathy, reassurance, advice, or simply a listening ear from trusted individuals such as friends, family members, romantic partners, or supportive online communities.

"I told one person during that time that understood me, but they couldn't really do anything."

(E111, Participant P1)

This statement shows an example of adaptive coping through social support as the participant chose to talk to someone she trusted during the cyberbullying. Although the person couldn't help much, reaching out reflects a healthy attempt to manage emotional distress rather than facing it alone. Therefore, her action is considered adaptive coping, even if it was limited in effectiveness.

"I have developed a strong bond with the server owner since we have gone through this incident together as victims. Before that, we weren't that close to each other. But after this, we often chat together and there is nothing we will hide from each other...She is quite supportive and she comforted me when I started to wonder if these were our faults. She will ask me to focus on myself, and not get affected by the perpetrators. "

(E36; E64, Participant P2)

This statement reflects adaptive coping through social support, as the participant developed a strong, trusting bond with the server owner during their shared experience of cyberbullying. Through open communication and emotional reassurance, the server owner provided comfort and encouragement, helping the participant manage self-doubt and stay focused on her well-being. This supportive relationship reduced feelings of isolation and strengthened her resilience.

"I reached out to my friend and told her about this. She comforted me to let me not be worried because they may not know that was me." "I sought help from a clinical psychologist... effective in developing more understanding about myself including determining my own trigger point, what affects me the most and how my emotions get

triggered. Another effective way is in changing my thoughts by noticing that this is not my fault."

(E48; E90, Participant P3)

The statements reflect the adaptive coping of social support, as the participant reached out to both informal and professional sources for help during her distress. She confided in a friend who offered emotional comfort and reassurance, helping to ease her immediate worry. Additionally, she sought assistance from a clinical psychologist, which provided her with tools to better understand her emotional responses, identify personal triggers, and shift her thinking patterns.

"So, my mother comforted my feelings and provided support to me." "There are other friends who can relate to my feelings so we talked a lot... This made me feel understood and relieved."

(E57; E71, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the adaptive coping strategy of social support used by the participant during the cyberbullying experience. The participant reported receiving emotional support from their mother, who comforted them after noticing changes in their emotional state. Additionally, the participant shared that they talked with friends who could relate to their feelings, which provided a sense of understanding and emotional relief.

"My boyfriend played a big role in supporting me during that time... helped me find ways to respond to the situation, which made me feel better emotionally." "I was also really touched by the rational netizens who defended me and spoke up—they brought me a sense of warmth amidst everything."

(E48; E49, Participant P5)

These statements reflect the adaptive coping of social support experienced by the participant during the cyberbullying incidents. She shared that her boyfriend was a major source of emotional and practical support, helping her manage the situation and guiding her on how to respond, which improved her emotional well-being. Additionally, she mentioned feeling touched by rational netizens who defended her online and spoke up on her behalf. Although unsolicited, their supportive actions provided her with a sense of warmth.

“There was a time I spent with my juniors after this incident. At that time, I have received some emotional support and let me not focus on the incident too much.”

“When I realized that I have friends in school, that made me feel better.”

(E75, Participant P6)

These statements reflect the use of adaptive coping through social support in the participant's experience of dealing with cyberbullying. After the incident, spending time with her juniors and receiving emotional support helped her shift focus away from the distressing experience, providing comfort and a sense of relief. Furthermore, the realization that she still had genuine friends at school brought reassurance and emotional stability.

Sub-theme 9.4: Self-Talk

Based on participants' responses, one out of six participants reported using self-talk.

Adaptive coping through self-talk involves using internal dialogue to manage stress, regulate emotions, and maintain a balanced perspective in the face of challenges like cyberbullying.

“I kept comforting and telling myself that this wasn't my fault... My negative feelings have changed into more positive, by thinking that they are so funny.”

(E20, Participant P2)

This statement demonstrates adaptive coping through self-talk, as the participant actively used internal dialogue to manage her emotional responses to the cyberbullying. By repeatedly reassuring herself that the situation wasn't her fault, she was able to challenge feelings of self-blame and regain a sense of control over her emotions. Additionally, by reframing the perpetrators' actions as ridiculous or "funny," she shifted her perspective from one of distress to one of emotional detachment and resilience. This positive self-talk helped her reduce the emotional impact of the harassment, allowing her to cope more effectively and maintain psychological stability despite ongoing attacks.

Theme 10: Maladaptive Coping

Sub-theme 10.1: Self-Blame and Internalization

According to participants' experiences, two out of six participants used self-blame and internalization as their coping strategy. Maladaptive coping through self-blame and internalization occurs when individuals direct the blame for harmful experiences, such as cyberbullying, inwardly toward themselves. This coping response often involves negative self-talk, guilt, and the belief that they are somehow responsible for the abuse they are enduring.

"Last time, I used to listen to music, but it makes the situation worse. It is because of the lyrics of the song that I listened to. Most of the songs are talking about blaming myself such as "I am the one who created the wrong" and "I am trash". At that time, I had a playlist with all of these kinds of songs. Then, my mood fluctuates a lot at that time."

(E96, Participant P3)

This statement reflects the maladaptive coping of self-blame and internalization, as the participant described how listening to certain types of music intensified her negative

emotions. The lyrics in her playlist, which focused on themes like personal fault and worthlessness, reinforced self-blaming thoughts and contributed to emotional instability. Instead of alleviating her distress, the music served to deepen her internalized feelings of guilt and inadequacy, leading to greater mood fluctuations.

"I began overanalyzing everything, blaming myself, and questioning my own personality or character. I kept wondering why something like this happened to me and whether I was somehow annoying enough for someone to treat me this way"

(E53, Participant P5)

This statement reflects the maladaptive coping of self-blame and internalization during the participant's experience with cyberbullying. She described a pattern of overanalyzing her behavior and personality, repeatedly questioning if there was something inherently wrong with her that caused the bullying. She wondered whether she was "annoying enough" to deserve such treatment, showing how she internalized the blame for what happened. Rather than placing responsibility on the perpetrator, she turned the situation inward, focusing on perceived personal flaws.

Sub-theme 10.2: Risky Behaviour or Attempt

Based on the responses, three out of six participants employed risky behaviours or attempt as their coping strategy. Maladaptive coping through risky behavior or attempt involves engaging in harmful or dangerous actions as a way to manage emotional distress caused by experiences such as cyberbullying.

“Excessive exercise. I started dancing just after I woke up in the morning, until 5am while everyone was asleep... I stopped when I realized my weight drop from 50+kg to 40+kg, which I realized that it is not healthy.”

(E102, Participant P2)

This statement reflects the maladaptive coping of risky behaviour or attempt, as the participant engaged in excessive and unregulated exercise by dancing for extremely long hours, from morning until 5am. This pattern continued until it resulted in unhealthy weight loss, with her weight dropping from over 50kg to under 40kg. The behaviour was physically harmful and unsustainable, indicating a maladaptive coping strategy that placed her physical health at risk.

“I even think to commit suicide at that time. But after that, I just let go...At the beginning, I just want them to feel regret or scared and know that their actions can kill someone. However, I think that they were not worth it so I stopped the thought. ”

(E28; E77, Participant P4)

This statement reflects the maladaptive coping strategy of risky behaviour or attempt, specifically through suicidal ideation. Participant P4 reported having thoughts of suicide during the period of cyberbullying. He stated that the initial motivation behind these thoughts was to make the perpetrators feel regret or fear by showing the potential consequences of their actions. This indicates a harmful and high-risk response to emotional distress. Although the participant ultimately decided against acting on these thoughts, the presence of suicidal ideation demonstrates an instance of maladaptive coping, where the emotional pain led to consideration of a dangerous and life-threatening action.

"Out of desperation, I threatened him, saying I was standing on the balcony — was that what he wanted, for me to jump? I had already exhausted every rational option I could think of..."

"When someone is pushed to their limit and nothing seems to work...those dark thoughts can start to surface."

(E40; E51, Participant P5)

These statements reflect the maladaptive coping of risky behaviour or attempt in the participant's response to prolonged cyberbullying. She described reaching a point of extreme emotional distress where, after trying numerous rational ways to resolve the situation without success, she threatened to harm herself by implying she might jump from her balcony. This expression of suicidal intent emerged out of desperation, as she felt completely powerless and emotionally overwhelmed. She acknowledged that when all options seemed to fail, dark and harmful thoughts began to surface.

Sub-theme 10.3: Suppression

According to the participants' experiences, three out of six participants employed suppression as their coping strategy. Maladaptive coping through suppression is a psychological response in which individuals attempt to deal with cyberbullying by consciously avoiding or pushing away negative thoughts and emotions related to the experience. Suppression hinders the processing of painful experiences and prevents the development of healthier coping mechanisms, making it an ultimately ineffective and potentially harmful way to manage the psychological impact of cyberbullying.

"I didn't think I have done much about my emotions, but just let it simmer out. So, I think this is one of the reasons that I don't really post anything after this. Maybe I did not focus on processing my emotions at that moment, so I continue on with them."

(E129, Participant P1)

This statement illustrates the maladaptive coping of suppression, as the participant admits that she did not actively process her emotions during the cyberbullying experience. Instead of confronting or expressing her feelings, she chose to let them "simmer out," which implies internalizing and avoiding emotional processing.

"For me, the emotional part is not the first thing that we need to focus on at that moment. We have a lot of things to work on, such as explaining to the members, apologizing to them, developing strategies to stop, kicking and banning the perpetrators. So, I have no time to think about the emotions and I don't even have time to cry."

(E60, Participant P2)

The participant's response reflects maladaptive coping through emotional suppression, as she chose to ignore her emotional needs to focus on managing the server and handling perpetrators. By saying she had "no time to cry," she consciously avoided processing her feelings, prioritizing tasks over emotional well-being.

"I did process all of the incident, but the processing of the emotional part was lacking."
"Also, I was grown in a family which did not allow us to express sadness. So, whenever I felt sad, I would tell myself "is ok it will be fine". "

(E38; E75, Participant P6)

These statements illustrate the use of maladaptive coping through suppression in the participant's response to cyberbullying. Although she acknowledged mentally processing the incident, she admitted that the emotional aspect remained unresolved, suggesting that she consciously avoided confronting or expressing her deeper feelings. This tendency is rooted in her upbringing, where expressing sadness was discouraged, leading her to internalize a habit

of emotional suppression. Instead of allowing herself to fully feel and work through the sadness caused by the bullying, she repeatedly told herself “it’s ok, it will be fine,” using self-reassurance as a way to avoid engaging with painful emotions. This pattern reflects a coping mechanism focused on pushing down distress rather than processing it, which may offer temporary stability but risks emotional buildup and long-term psychological consequences.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Strain Originating from the Victims

This study examines how victims perceive the origin of their strain in cyberbullying contexts and suggests that strain may originate from the victims themselves, the perpetrators, or significant others. Strain originating from the victims refers to emotional or psychological distress that comes from within the victims themselves, rather than directly from external actions from perpetrators. This type of strain arises from how victims interpret, internalize, or respond to their experiences—such as feeling guilty, blaming themselves, struggling with unmet expectations, or feeling helpless despite their efforts. Even when others are the cause of harm, the victim’s own emotional processing becomes a significant source of strain.

Sabanci and Cekic (2019) highlight that when individuals face cyberbullying or other distressing experiences that align with or contradict their self-identity and personal assumptions, they are more likely to form irrational thoughts or beliefs as a result. Within the framework of cybervictimization, the cognitive model provides insight into how the experience of online bullying develops. The triggering factor is the ongoing exposure to cyberbullying, which generates a highly stressful atmosphere for the victim (Kwan et al., 2020). This distressing situation activates existing personal beliefs. When these thoughts evolve into distorted perceptions—such as feeling helpless to intervene (low self-efficacy), experiencing reduced self-worth (low self-esteem), or blaming oneself for the abuse (self-blame)—they lead to emotional strain (Stewart & Bernard, 2023).

These reflections align with the participants' experiences. Participant P1 mentioned her feelings of helplessness regain control over her life created an overwhelming emotional burden, making her living in fear. Likewise, Participant P3 internalized the blame, criticizing herself and referring to her actions as a “stupid decision,” showing self-directed judgment rather than blaming the perpetrator. Participant P6 expressed emotional distress stemming

from the imbalance between the emotional effort she gave and what she received, leaving her feeling mistreated and puzzled as to why her kindness was met with cruelty.

These elements do not influence the individual in a linear way; rather, they form a repeating cycle. Continued cybervictimization gradually weakens a person's sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, which in turn strengthens harmful self-perceptions and increases their vulnerability to further bullying (Rosen et al., 2007). Also, according to Rosen et al. (2007), Studies have shown that victims often attributed their experiences of victimization to stable and internal characteristics of their own identity. This two-way interaction forms a cycle in which personal beliefs and experiences of victimization continuously reinforce each other, making it increasingly difficult to disrupt the pattern (Anichitoe et al., 2021).

The participants' experiences demonstrate that emotional strain can originate internally, shaped by how they interpret and respond to cybervictimization. Feelings of helplessness, self-blame, and emotional imbalance were common, highlighting that victims' own perceptions and beliefs significantly influence the severity of their distress. Rather than being a direct outcome of external actions alone, the harm deepens through personal emotional processing, creating a cycle that reinforces vulnerability and prolongs the impact. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing internal cognitive and emotional factors when supporting victims of cyberbullying.

5.1.2 Strain Originating from the Perpetrators

Strain originating from the perpetrators refers to the emotional and psychological distress experienced by victims as a direct result of the perpetrators' harmful actions. This includes behaviours such as threats, harassment, manipulation, public shaming, or invasion of privacy. The strain is externally imposed — it comes from what the perpetrators do to the victim.

Harassment refers to the repeated delivery of offensive or threatening messages to victims (Peled, 2019; Watts et al., 2017). This can include sending threatening texts or emails, sharing intimate images without consent, impersonating the victim online, inciting others to harass them, or unlawfully gathering their personal data (Worsley et al., 2017). Such persistent harassment from offenders often leads to severe emotional distress for victims (Vogels, 2021). For instance, Participant P3, fearing exposure after repeated threats to share her private videos with her Facebook followers, ultimately complied with the perpetrator's coercive demands for sexual texting.

Doxxing, another form of cyberbullying, involves maliciously uncovering and sharing a person's private information—such as their address, phone number, or ID—without permission, typically to harm their reputation (Lee, 2020). Participant P6 reported her private information was disclosed on Facebook page including her address, phone number and identity card number, causing her to feel distress in a sense of privacy violation.

In the case of public shaming, individuals are 'punished' by having their character or morals deemed unfit for certain social relationships, effectively labeling them as deserving of exclusion (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021). This kind of treatment undermines a victim's dignity and the basic respect owed to all individuals. Participant P4 felt deeply overwhelmed when their photos were shared on Facebook for ridicule, especially due to the mocking comments targeting their appearance and the dehumanizing labels, such as being compared to a dog.

Strain originating from perpetrators in the context of cyberbullying is a significant source of emotional and psychological distress for victims. As demonstrated through various forms such as harassment, doxxing, and public shaming, the actions of perpetrators impose external pressure and harm that deeply affect the well-being of individuals. Harassment through repeated threats or offensive communication can coerce victims into unwanted

behaviors out of fear, as seen in Participant P3's case. Doxxing, exemplified by Participant P6's experience, violates personal boundaries and triggers anxiety through exposure of private information. Meanwhile, public shaming attacks a victim's moral identity and social inclusion, leaving lasting emotional damage, as Participant P4 experienced. These examples highlight how perpetrator-driven cyberbullying behaviors generate intense strain.

5.1.3 Strain Originating from Significant Others

Strain originating from significant others refers to the emotional distress that arises when victims are affected by the responses or conditions of people they care about and are emotionally connected to, such as family, close friends, or romantic partner or peers. This strain can occur when significant others fail to provide support, respond in invalidating ways, or when victims witness these important individuals experiencing distress themselves. Because of the emotional bond, these experiences can deeply affect the victim, leading to feelings of helplessness, guilt, sadness, or emotional disconnection.

Perceived emotional invalidation occurs when someone's emotional expressions are met with responses that suggest their feelings are wrong or inappropriate (Zielinski & Veilleux, 2018). When victims of cyberbullying attempt to express their emotions but receive dismissive or unsupportive reactions instead of empathy, it can prevent them from accessing meaningful social support. This lack of validation disrupts their sense of connection and belonging, resulting in significant emotional distress (Zhou et al., 2023). For example, Participant P5 felt deeply distressed as those around her, including her parents, dismissed her fears, blamed her, and responded with anger rather than support.

Additionally, witnessing significant others in distress can also be a source of strain for victims of cyberbullying. Research by Doumas and Midgett (2020) found that individuals who observe cyberbullying often experience heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and

physical symptoms, as the inability to intervene leaves them feeling helpless. Participant P2 expressed that the most distressing part of the experience was seeing their friend develop severe anxiety and have repeated suicidal thoughts as a result of the cyberbullying. They felt emotionally overwhelmed and helpless, knowing their friend was deeply affected but being unable to do anything to alleviate her suffering.

Strain originating from significant others plays a critical role in intensifying the emotional distress experienced by victims of cyberbullying. This form of strain arises not from the perpetrators, but from the responses or emotional states of those close to the victim. When victims perceive emotional invalidation from these significant others, such as dismissiveness, blame, or anger, it can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder their ability to seek effective support, as shown in Participant P5's experience. Furthermore, witnessing significant others suffer due to the cyberbullying, as in Participant P2's case, can evoke profound feelings of helplessness and guilt.

5.1.4 Emotional Impacts

This study explored the impacts of cyberbullying victimization including emotional impacts, behavioural impacts, relationship impacts, cognitive impacts and physical impacts. The emotional impacts theme captures the intense and wide-ranging emotional responses experienced by participants as a result of cyberbullying. Across all six cases, participants reported feeling overwhelmed by difficult emotions that emerged during and after the incidents. These emotional reactions included fear, anxiety, and panic—often triggered by the anticipation of further attacks or reminders of previous harassment. Many also described prolonged sadness, emotional numbness, and depressive symptoms, including frequent crying and low mood. Some participants experienced anger or frustration at being targeted or

misunderstood, while others struggled with feelings of guilt, regret, and self-blame related to how they responded to the bullying or the consequences that followed.

Research supports the strong link between cyberbullying and anxiety (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2020). For example, Participant P5 reported extreme anxiety and fear, feeling as though the perpetrator was constantly watching her. This sense of being monitored led to a continuous feeling of insecurity and emotional unease, even in safe environments like her home or school, and resulted in frequent panic and heightened paranoia.

Depressive symptoms are another serious outcome of cyberbullying. Maurya et al. (2022) found that victims of cyberbullying were over twice as likely to experience depression compared to non-victims. Participant P6, for instance, felt deeply sad and disappointed upon realizing she had become a target, as rumors and exclusion from others—including strangers—escalated over time, contributing to significant emotional strain.

Interestingly, half of the participants reported experiencing emotional numbness. Victims can go through intense mood fluctuations, quickly shifting from feelings of anger to sadness and then to emotional numbness (NeuroLaunch, 2024). For example, Participant P3 initially coped by crying nightly but eventually became emotionally numb due to the constant pressure, reflecting how prolonged distress can lead individuals to emotionally shut down.

5.1.5 Behavioural Impacts

The behavioural impacts theme encompasses the noticeable changes in participants' actions, habits, and decision-making that occurred as a result of experiencing cyberbullying. These changes were reflected in how participants interacted with others, both online and offline, and how they adjusted their daily routines to avoid further harm. Many individuals described withdrawing from social environments, becoming more isolated, and reducing their participation in group activities or public spaces. Online, they often disengaged from

platforms where the bullying took place—deleting accounts, limiting interactions, or avoiding social media altogether. Communication styles also shifted, with participants becoming more reserved, cautious, and less expressive in conversations. In some cases, the bullying experience influenced major life decisions, such as quitting competitions or avoiding certain schools. These behavioural responses demonstrate how cyberbullying affected not only the participants' emotional states but also their outward behaviours.

Research by Coelho et al. (2022) found that students who experienced bullying, including cyberbullying, showed a significantly greater increase in social withdrawal over time compared to their peers who were not involved. In this study, all participants reported social withdrawal and isolation as consequences of cyberbullying. For instance, Participant P1 avoided social activities due to fear that people at school connected to the perpetrator might share her personal information. This fear led to a shrinking social circle and the loss of close friendships. Such withdrawal highlights how cyberbullying can drive victims to isolate themselves as a form of self-protection, cutting off even long-standing relationships due to fear and mistrust.

Additionally, Liu et al. (2025) reported that victims of cyberbullying often undergo noticeable shifts in personality traits, particularly marked declines in agreeableness and extraversion. Agreeableness is a personality trait reflected in behaviours that are kind, cooperative, empathetic, and friendly toward others (Eva et al., 2021), appears to diminish as a result of these experiences. Participant P2 reflected this change, noting she became significantly less friendly and communicative online, choosing to stay quiet to avoid provoking potential attacks. This demonstrates how cyberbullying can alter communication behaviour, making victims more reserved and less trusting in their interactions with others.

5.1.6 Relationship Impacts

The relationship impacts theme explores how cyberbullying affected the participants' connections with others, including friends, family members, and broader social circles. Many participants experienced a breakdown in friendships, either because peers distanced themselves, failed to provide support, or were connected to the perpetrators. This disconnection often occurred gradually, marked by silence, reduced communication, and emotional withdrawal. In terms of family dynamics, the impact varied—some participants became more closed off, choosing not to share their experiences with family members, while others reported strengthened bonds with certain relatives who noticed emotional changes and offered support. A common thread among participants was the emergence of trust issues, where they became increasingly cautious about forming or maintaining relationships, often fearing betrayal, judgment, or further harm.

Cyberbullying can significantly disrupt victims' social lives, particularly affecting their relationships with peers and their experiences in school settings. It also influences family dynamics and friendships, often leading to increased feelings of isolation, loneliness, and diminished trust in those who were once considered sources of support (Kumar & Goldstein, 2021). For instance, Participant P5 recounted how their family support deteriorated after their mother invalidated their feelings and their father reacted aggressively by smashing their phone, thinking they were exaggerating. As a result, the participant decided to suppress their negative experiences and only communicate positive updates. Similarly, Participant P4 experienced a loss of friendships when some peers distanced themselves due to pressure from others who held negative views of them.

Despite these negative outcomes, some participants did report strengthened family relationships. Participant P4 described a closer bond with their family after their mother noticed emotional changes, initiated a supportive conversation, and offered help, which

brought them closer together. Research by Doty and Girón (2022) also indicates that proactive parental involvement may not only strengthen family ties but also help protect adolescents from the harmful effects of cyberbullying.

Additionally, trust issues emerged as a common consequence among all participants. Pieschl and Porsch (2017) found that negative cyberbullying experiences were linked to reduced levels of generalized trust, highlighting how these incidents can affect victims' broader interpersonal outlook.

Participant P2 highlighted that cyberbullying led to trust issues, noting that while it is easier to judge people's intentions in person, the anonymity of the online environment made it difficult to know who might cause harm, resulting in greater difficulty trusting others.

5.1.7 Cognitive Impacts

The cognitive impacts theme captures the ways in which cyberbullying affected participants' thought patterns, mental processing, and perceptions of themselves and others. After experiencing cyberbullying, many individuals reported becoming trapped in cycles of overthinking, hypervigilance, and self-criticism. Their minds remained preoccupied with fears of future attacks, constant self-monitoring, and second-guessing their actions or words. Some participants developed persistent negative views of themselves, repeatedly questioning their worth and blaming themselves for what had happened. Others described feeling mentally exhausted from continually analyzing social interactions and anticipating threats, which interfered with their ability to focus or make decisions. In some cases, participants even expressed a sense of learned helplessness, believing that no matter what they did, they could not change or control the situation.

This finding indicates that victims often misinterpret neutral cues as threats due to a heightened state of reactive hypervigilance, which impairs their ability to regulate emotional

responses effectively (Bonilla-Santos et al., 2022). Participant P2 demonstrated cognitive impacts of cyberbullying through severe overthinking and hypervigilance, consistently feeling anxious and paranoid about being observed or judged. This persistent fear led her to obsessively monitor how others perceived her, reflecting the intrusive and persistent nature of her worries.

Additionally, experiencing bullying can worsen victims' negative self-perception while diminishing their positive self-assessment. Research shows that cyberbullying victimization can significantly lower positive self-evaluations (Orchard & Reynolds, 2022). Participant P5 experienced cognitive impacts of cyberbullying through negative self-appraisal, overanalyzing her actions, blaming themselves, and questioning their own personality and worth, constantly wondering if their behavior had provoked the mistreatment.

5.1.8 Physical Impacts

The physical impacts theme highlights the bodily symptoms and health issues that participants experienced as a direct result of the emotional and psychological strain caused by cyberbullying. Common symptoms included sleep disturbances, such as difficulty falling asleep, frequent waking, and prolonged insomnia, as well as appetite issues like skipping meals, nausea, and a general loss of interest in eating. Some individuals also experienced stress-related physical symptoms, including headaches, stomach pain, body aches, and visual disturbances, which had no clear medical explanation but appeared during periods of high emotional tension. These physical reactions demonstrate that the impact of cyberbullying can extend into the body, disrupting basic physical functions and contributing to an overall decline in victims' health and daily well-being.

The relationship between the victimization of cyberbullying and sleep problems is influenced by the frequency of victimization (Wang et al., 2020). Participant P1 experienced

sleep disturbances during the peak of cyberbullying, which gradually resolved as the frequency of the incidents declined. Poor appetite is also one of the results of cyberbullying (Mikhaylovsky et al., 2019). Participant P3 experienced severe appetite loss due to intense sadness from cyberbullying, leading to physical weakness, faintness, and difficulty performing basic tasks like writing. According to Mikhaylovsky et al.(2019), cyberbullying affects the functioning of the whole body. Participant P1 was also experience frequent headaches, eye strain, and intense physical discomfort, even during periods of rest or activity, due to the ongoing stress of cyberbullying.

5.1.9 Adaptive coping

This study reveals the coping strategies employed by victims of cyberbullying, including adaptive coping and maladaptive coping. The adaptive coping theme focuses on the strategies and behaviours participants developed to manage and recover from the negative impacts of cyberbullying. Despite the intense distress they experienced, several individuals found ways to adjust their actions, thoughts, or environments to protect themselves and regain a sense of control. These coping strategies included setting stricter boundaries online, limiting social media use, becoming more cautious in choosing friends, and seeking support from trusted individuals such as close family members or partners. Some participants redirected their energy into academic work, hobbies, or private conversations where they felt safer and less exposed. Adaptive coping also involved recognizing the need for emotional distance from harmful environments or people, and in some cases, gradually rebuilding self-confidence and social trust. This theme reflects the participants' efforts to respond proactively to their experiences, showing resilience by finding ways to minimize harm, preserve emotional stability, and create safer spaces for themselves both online and offline.

Robinson and Segal (2024) suggested that engaging in enjoyable activities can support adaptive coping, as pursuing hobbies and interests helps reduce the emotional weight of cyberbullying experiences. In line with this, Participant P3 participated in co-curricular activities like sports to manage the emotional aftermath of cyberbullying, describing it as an effective outlet for releasing anger and channeling difficult emotions constructively. Byrne (2021) also emphasized that many cyberbullying victims turn to immediate coping strategies such as blocking bullies, withholding comments, or self-censoring. Similarly, most participants employed problem-focused strategies like blocking and reporting. Although these methods had mixed success, blocking was somewhat useful when perpetrators were known, but in cases like Participant P2's, where multiple perpetrators created alternative accounts, its effectiveness was limited. Reporting was also found to be largely ineffective; for Participant P2, platforms took little action, while for Participant P4, it initially worsened the situation but eventually deterred some perpetrators out of fear of consequences.

Social support emerged as the most common adaptive coping strategy, with all participants seeking assistance from friends. However, its effectiveness varied; while empathetic friends offered meaningful support, invalidating responses from others made the support feel ineffective. Chi et al. (2020) discovered that students were more inclined to seek support from friends, while only a small number turned to teachers for help. Align with the study, only two participants sought help from their parents—Participant P4 found comfort and emotional validation from his mother, whereas Participant P5 encountered blaming and invalidation, rendering the support ineffective. Additionally, one participant, Participant P3, sought professional help from a clinical psychologist when her condition worsened and found it beneficial for cognitive restructuring. Participant P5 also sought help from a romantic partner, who provided emotional support and coping advice.

One participant also relied on positive self-talk as a coping mechanism. According to Chaizuran et al. (2020), positive self-talk interventions can effectively enhance coping strategies, particularly among younger students. Participant P2 applied this method by repeatedly reassuring herself that the situation was not her fault, reframing the perpetrators' behavior as laughable rather than threatening. This allowed her to emotionally distance herself from the harassment and maintain psychological resilience despite ongoing cyberbullying.

In conclusion, the findings highlight that despite the significant emotional, cognitive, and physical toll of cyberbullying, participants demonstrated various adaptive coping strategies to manage its impacts. These strategies included seeking social support, engaging in hobbies, setting online boundaries, using self-talk, and, in some cases, seeking professional help. Although some strategies, such as blocking, reporting, and certain types of social support, were questionable in their effectiveness, they still represented adaptive efforts to regain control and protect emotional well-being. Overall, the participants' proactive actions reflect resilience and emphasize the importance of supportive environments, emotional regulation, and accessible coping resources in helping cyberbullying victims recover and rebuild their sense of safety.

5.1.10 Maladaptive Coping

The maladaptive coping theme captures the ways in which some participants responded to cyberbullying in ways that, while initially aimed at reducing distress, ultimately had negative effects on their emotional, social, or physical well-being. Rather than helping them heal, these coping strategies often deepened feelings of isolation, reinforced negative thought patterns, or worsened physical symptoms. Examples of maladaptive coping included suppressing emotions rather than expressing them, risky behaviour or attempts, and self-

blame and internalization. This theme illustrates how, under severe emotional pressure, victims may adopt coping methods that provide short-term relief but contribute to longer-term difficulties in emotional recovery and social reintegration.

Three participants reported engaging in risky behaviors or actions as a way of coping with cyberbullying. Previous research also links cyberbullying to a heightened risk of suicidal behaviors (Baiden and Tadeo, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; John et al., 2018). Participant P5 described reaching a state of severe emotional distress, where, after multiple unsuccessful attempts to resolve the situation through rational means, she expressed suicidal intent by implying she might jump from her balcony. This threat arose from feelings of complete powerlessness and emotional overload. Similarly, Participant P4 experienced suicidal thoughts, initially motivated by a desire to make the perpetrators realize the potential consequences of their actions. However, both Participant P4 and Participant P5 eventually abandoned these thoughts after recognizing the harm they would cause themselves. Additionally, Participant P3 coped through excessive and unregulated physical activity, dancing for extremely long periods which eventually led to unhealthy weight loss.

Three participants also relied on emotional suppression as a coping strategy. Research by Wang (2021) and Geng et al. (2021) highlights that many victims tend to use maladaptive coping strategies, like avoidance or passive behaviour, which do not successfully reduce the harmful effects of cyberbullying. This finding aligns with the results of other studies by Gupta et al. (2023) and Gavcar et al. (2024), which noted victims' reluctance to seek help for emotional difficulties. Participant P1, for example, adopted a problem-focused approach to handling the situation but neglected the emotional strain that also required attention. Meanwhile, Participant P6, influenced by her upbringing where expressing sadness was discouraged, developed a habitual pattern of emotional suppression in response to distress.

The findings demonstrate that maladaptive coping strategies were commonly used by participants when dealing with the emotional strain of cyberbullying. Behaviours such as risky actions, emotional suppression, and self-blame emerged as immediate but ultimately harmful responses to overwhelming stress. Participants who engaged in risky behaviours, such as expressing suicidal intent or excessive physical exertion, reflected the depth of their emotional desperation and loss of control. Similarly, participants who relied on emotional suppression avoided addressing their internal distress, which only prolonged their emotional suffering. These coping patterns align with previous research showing that victims of cyberbullying often struggle to seek help or express their emotional needs effectively.

Theoretical Implication

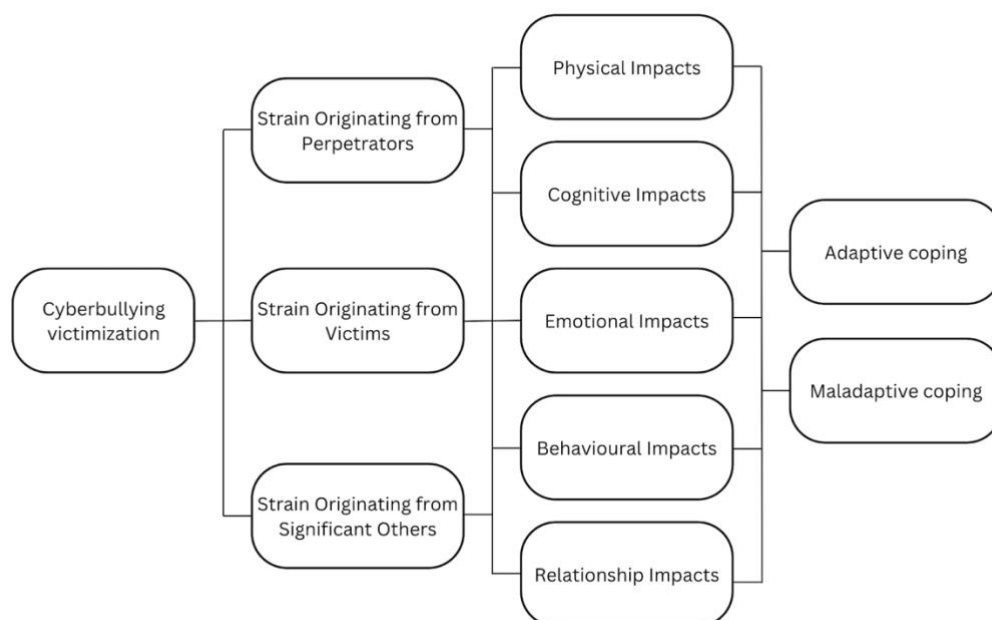


Figure 3: General Strain Theory (Theoretical Implication)

The findings of this study provide strong theoretical implications for future research, particularly in the context of Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST). GST proposes that individuals who experience strain or stress are more likely to develop negative emotions, such as anger or depression, which may lead them to engage in deviant or maladaptive

coping behaviours. This study supports and extends GST by highlighting cyberbullying as a unique and increasingly prevalent form of strain among youths.

According to Agnew (1992), strain from exposure to negative or harmful stimuli includes experiences where individuals face unwanted circumstances or negative treatment from others, such as harassment, bullying, or victimization. However, this study introduces an additional perspective. Based on participants' responses, it appears that strain in cyberbullying situations is not only due to negative stimuli but also arises from goal blockage such as unreciprocated emotional investment and the loss of something valued, like the friendship breakdown.

Beyond identifying types of strain, the study also examines how victims perceive the origin of their strain in cyberbullying contexts. This findings suggest that strain may originating from the victims themselves, the perpetrators, or significant others. This offers a fresh theoretical perspective on understanding cyberbullying victimization.

Building on Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST), which posits that emotions are both outcomes of strain and mediators influencing coping behaviours, this study explores not only emotional effects but also behavioural, cognitive, relational, and physical impacts on victims. These various impacts contribute to the development of negative emotions in victims.

According to GST, an individual's response to strain depends on factors like coping skills, social support, peer influences, social control, crime-related beliefs, and personality traits like self-control. In this study, participants engaged in both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Social support emerged as the most frequently employed coping strategy among all participants. Moreover, maladaptive coping was commonly associated with intense negative emotions such as helplessness, anger, and sadness, supporting the idea of GST that negative emotions can drive maladaptive responses.

Future research should build upon these findings by investigating how the characteristics of digital environments—such as 24/7 connectivity, lack of escape, and audience size—may amplify the effects of strain beyond what is traditionally outlined in GST. Additionally, researchers should consider longitudinal studies that examine how repeated or chronic cyberbullying affects emotional trajectories over time and whether this cumulative strain leads to escalating forms of deviance or mental health issues. Incorporating variables such as social media usage patterns, online social support, and digital literacy into GST models could offer a more comprehensive understanding of strain in the digital age. Moreover, future studies should explore individual differences in vulnerability to cyberbullying strain, such as personality traits, emotional intelligence, or prior trauma history, to better explain why some individuals are more negatively affected than others.

Practical Implication

The findings of this study have important practical implications for the development of programs and policies aimed at addressing cyberbullying among Malaysian youths. Firstly, the results underscore the urgent need for strengthening counselling services to better support victims of cyberbullying. Organizations such as the Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia (LKM) can benefit from this study by incorporating specialized training modules for counsellors that focus on understanding the emotional strains and diverse coping mechanisms associated with cyberbullying victimization. By equipping counsellors with targeted skills and knowledge, counselling services can become more responsive and effective, ultimately restoring trust and encouraging more youths to seek professional help.

Additionally, educational institutions, particularly secondary schools and universities, should implement structured intervention programs that include cyberbullying awareness campaigns, mental health workshops, and resilience-building activities. These programs must

be designed to foster a safe and supportive school environment, encouraging students to report incidents without fear of stigma.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of integrating digital literacy, including artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, into public education initiatives. With the Malaysian government's "AI untuk Rakyat" initiative already underway, there is an opportunity to extend this program by incorporating modules on recognizing, preventing, and responding to cyberbullying threats online. This would empower youths to navigate digital spaces more safely and critically. Together, these practical applications of the study's findings can contribute to building a more resilient, digitally literate, and emotionally healthy youth population in Malaysia.

Any Alternative Explanation of the Findings

Cultural factors inherent to Malaysian society may offer another layer of explanation. The cultural emphasis on maintaining family honor and avoiding public shame may pressure victims to remain silent about their experiences, leading to the internalization of strain and the adoption of passive or avoidant coping strategies. Such cultural nuances may shape the expression of negative emotions and the choice of coping mechanisms differently than what GST alone would predict.

Furthermore, individual-level differences such as emotional intelligence, resilience, previous exposure to trauma, and the availability of social support networks could significantly influence how victims perceive and respond to cyberbullying strain. Some youths may possess personal strengths or external resources that enable them to withstand emotional distress more effectively than others, suggesting that coping behaviors are not purely determined by strain but are also mediated by personal and environmental factors. Acknowledging these alternative explanations enriches the interpretation of the findings,

highlighting the complexity of cyberbullying victimization and the need for multi-theoretical approaches in future research.

Limitations of the Study

One significant limitation of this study lies in the small sample size employed. Although qualitative research, particularly phenomenology, prioritizes the depth of understanding over breadth, relying on the narratives of only six participants constrains the generalizability of the findings. The experiences captured may not fully represent the diverse spectrum of Malaysian youths who have encountered cyberbullying. Youths come from different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, and these differences could influence how they perceive and respond to cyberbullying victimization. Hence, although rich, the current dataset may inadvertently omit voices from minority groups, rural youths, or those less digitally engaged, potentially limiting the breadth of insights gained. This limitation suggests that while the study offers profound personal experiences, it should be interpreted with caution when considering broader population-level implications.

Another important limitation concerns the methodological inconsistency arising from the mixed interview modes. In this study, four interviews were conducted face-to-face, while two were conducted online. Although this flexible approach was necessary due to logistical challenges, it may have affected the quality and depth of data collected. Face-to-face interviews often facilitate better rapport, allow for observation of non-verbal communication, and create an atmosphere of trust that encourages participants to share sensitive information more openly. In contrast, online interviews, although convenient, can sometimes feel impersonal or be hindered by technological issues, such as poor internet connectivity, that disrupt the flow of conversation. This variation may have led to discrepancies in participants'

emotional expression and the richness of narratives, potentially affecting the overall cohesiveness and consistency of the data.

Lastly, the study's reliance on self-reported data introduces inherent biases that must be acknowledged. Participants' recollections of their cyberbullying experiences are subject to memory distortions, exaggeration, minimization, or even intentional omission, particularly for highly traumatic events. Given the sensitive nature of topics like suicidal ideation, substance abuse, or illegal activities as coping mechanisms, participants might have been reluctant to disclose maladaptive coping behaviours openly, especially if they feared judgment or repercussions, even with assurances of confidentiality. These limitations collectively suggest the need for cautious interpretation and the value of triangulating findings with other sources or methods in future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to build a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying victimization among youths, future research should aim to broaden the sample size and diversity. Expanding participant recruitment across different states, including rural and urban areas, various ethnic communities, and different educational institutions would allow for a richer, more representative dataset. Incorporating participants from a wider range of age groups — such as early adolescents (13-15) and emerging adults (25-30) — could also highlight developmental differences in coping strategies and emotional responses. Researchers should also consider ensuring gender diversity and inclusivity of underrepresented groups, such as LGBTQ+ youths, who may experience cyberbullying in uniquely stigmatized ways. This broader and more heterogeneous sampling would enhance the external validity of the findings and allow for more nuanced policy recommendations.

Furthermore, future studies should adopt a more standardized methodological approach, preferably choosing either face-to-face or online interviews exclusively to maintain consistency in the data collection process. If online interviews remain necessary, researchers should implement strategies to replicate the intimacy of face-to-face interactions, such as using video conferencing with proper rapport-building protocols. In addition, employing triangulation — such as combining interviews with diary studies, observational methods, or psychological assessments — could mitigate self-report biases and provide a more holistic understanding of cyberbullying impacts. Another important direction would be conducting longitudinal research, tracking victims' experiences over time to explore how their coping mechanisms and emotional states evolve. Such studies could reveal whether early interventions are effective or if certain coping strategies lead to better long-term mental health outcomes compared to others.

Lastly, future research should move beyond descriptive studies toward evaluating interventions and preventive strategies. Research could assess the effectiveness of school-based anti-cyberbullying programs, AI-driven online safety tools, or resilience-building workshops. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts would help determine whether the coping strategies observed are culture-specific or universal. Exploring the role of family dynamics, peer support networks, and even religious or spiritual coping mechanisms could add depth to the understanding of protective factors. By expanding the methodological rigor, diversifying samples, and moving toward applied, solution-focused research, future studies can make a significant contribution toward reducing the devastating impact of cyberbullying on young people in Malaysia and beyond.

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APPENDICES

Action Plan

Action Plan of UAPC3093 Project Paper II

Supervisee Wong Woon Sheng

Supervisor Dr Anisah Zainab Binti Musa

Task Description	Date	Supervisee's Signature	Supervisor's Signature	Supervisor's Remarks	Next Appointment Date/Time
Methodology Submit Chapter 3: Methodology Amend Chapter 3: Methodology	21 Feb 2025			Chapter 3 completed	10 Apr 2025
Results & Findings Submit Chapter 4: Results Amend Chapter 4: Results	10 Apr 2025			Chapter 4 completed	25 Apr 2025
Discussion & Conclusion Submit Chapter 5: Discussion Amend Chapter 5: Discussion	25 Apr 2025			Chapter 5 completed	28 Apr 2025
Abstract	28 Apr 2025			Completed	
Turnitin Submission	28 Apr 2025			Generate similarity rate from Turnitin.com	
Amendment	29 Apr 2025			Completed	
Submission of final draft	30 Apr 2025			Submission of hardcopy and documents	
Oral Presentation					

- Notes:
1. Deadline for submission cannot be changed, mark deduction is as per faculty standard.
 2. Supervisees are to take the active role to make appointments with their supervisors.
 3. Both supervisors and supervisees should keep a copy of this action plan.
 4. This Action Plan should be attached as an appendix in Project Paper 2.

Informed Consent



UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING
BACHELOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (HONS) GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

UAPC3083 Project Paper II

INFORMED CONSENT

1. The purpose of the research, expected duration, and procedures

This research aims to explore the experiences of cyberbullying victimization among youths in Malaysia. The duration involves an interview session, and the session will be conducted for approximately 90 minutes. The session will be audio or video recorded using a smartphone, laptop, or any suitable electronic device. The session will be conducted physically or face-to-face at the participant's setting or other relevant settings.

2. Right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun

Participant has the right to decline to participate or to withdraw from the research once participation has begun. In addition, the consultee has the right to terminate or withdraw from the session at any time.

3. The foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing

There will be no adverse consequences of declining or withdrawing from this research as the participation is voluntary.

4. Reasonably foreseeable factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate, such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects

There should be no risk or adverse effects involved in this research. However, the participant might have experienced minor discomfort due to the personal issues discussed.

5. Limits of confidentiality

The participant's personal information and audio or video-recorded sessions will be kept private and confidential. The information obtained from the research will be used for the purpose of knowledge and the learning process only.

6. Incentives for participation

No incentive or payment is involved in this research project. Participation in this research project is totally based on voluntary basis.

7. Whom to contact for questions about the research and research participants' rights

Dr Anisah Zainab Musa K.B.; P.A.
Assistant Professor/Registered Counsellor
Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat,
31900 Kampar, Perak.
Email: anisah@utar.edu.my
Phone: 017-6799354

Informed Consent Form

Hereby I, [REDACTED] (NAME), understand the terms and conditions stated above and agree to participate in this research project as a participant. I am able and willing to share my experience during interview.

Your signature below shows that you agree to the terms and conditions.

[REDACTED]

Participant

16/3/2025

Date

[REDACTED]

16/3/2025

Researcher

Date

Field Note

FIELD NOTE

<p>Date: 3 MAR 2025</p> <p>Time: 12 pm</p> <p>Location: Counseling Room</p> <p>Interviewee: Participant P1</p> <p>Interviewer: WONG</p>	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Interviewee sat comfortably on the sofa, appearing relaxed, leaning back	This may indicate that interviewee felt safe and unguarded to share during the interview
Interviewee demonstrated a clear tone of voice in her delivery.	It may reflect to the a level of emotional readiness in sharing her experience.
Interviewee maintained steady eye contact most of the time during interview.	It may reflect interviewee's engagement in the interview and focus on the conversation

Intake Form

INTAKE FORM

Date: 03/03/25 Time: 12pm

Name: [REDACTED] Date of birth: 07/03/25

Gender: Female Age: 23 Education Level: University Major: [REDACTED]

Nationality: Malaysian Ethnicity: - Races: Chinese Religion: Buddhist

Employment Status: Student Occupation: Student Marital Status: Single

Current Residence: (country) Malaysia Number of household members: 6

Home Address: [REDACTED] City: Johor Bahru State: Johor Postcode: 80350

Phone: [REDACTED] Email Address: [REDACTED]

Emergency Contact Person: (name) [REDACTED]

Relationship to you: [REDACTED] Phone: [REDACTED]

Cyberbullying Victimization History

Have you experienced cyberbullying victimization: Yes Since when: 2019 / 2021

How long did the cyberbullying last: weeks / month Has the cyberbullying stopped: Yes


Platforms were used for the cyberbullying: Facebook, phone

Types of cyberbullying were experienced: Harassment + Threat

Did the cyberbullying experience leads severe negative impacts on your mental health?:
Yes

Are you comfortable and willing to share your experiences this interview?:
Yes

Consent Form

 Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman	FORM	REF NO. : FM-LIB-501
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		EFFECTIVE DATE : 24/06/2024
		PAGE : 1

Title of Final Work : Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Degree Awarded : Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Guidance and Counselling

Faculty : Faculty of Arts and Social Science

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have fully read and understood the Open Access (OA) Policy for Scholarly Output, and agree to abide by the terms and conditions outlined in the Policy.

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Name: Wong Woen Sheng

ID: 2202908

Date: 28 Apr 2025

Signature: _____

Supervisor's Name: Dr Anisah Zainab Binti Musa

Date: _____

Expert Reviews (Interview Protocol) 1



Expertise Review

Title of Study: Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Researcher: Wong Woen Sheng

Supervisor: Dr Anisah Zainab binti Musa

Purpose of Expert Review

The purpose of this expert review is to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview protocol designed for the above-mentioned study. The expert reviewers are asked to provide their professional opinions and suggestions on the interview questions, structure, and procedures.

Review Procedures:

1. **Review of Interview Questions:** The expert reviewers are asked to review the interview questions for clarity, relevance, simplicity and ambiguity to the research objectives.
2. **Review of Interview Structure:** The expert reviewers are asked to review the structure of the interview, including the sequence of questions and the estimated time for the interview.

Expert Reviewer Feedback:

Please provide your feedback on the following aspects of the interview protocol:

1. **Interview Questions:** Are the questions clear, and relevant to the research objectives? Do you have any suggestions for improving the questions?
2. **Interview Structure:** Is the structure of the interview appropriate? Do you have any suggestions for improving the structure?

We would appreciate it if you could evaluate by selecting the relevant option on the Likert scale presented below.

Expert Reviews (Interview Protocol) 1



Expertise Review

Title of Study: Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Researcher: Wong Woen Sheng

Supervisor: Dr Anisah Zainab binti Musa

Purpose of Expert Review

The purpose of this expert review is to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview protocol designed for the above-mentioned study. The expert reviewers are asked to provide their professional opinions and suggestions on the interview questions, structure, and procedures.

Review Procedures:

1. **Review of Interview Questions:** The expert reviewers are asked to review the interview questions for clarity, relevance, simplicity and ambiguity to the research objectives.
2. **Review of Interview Structure:** The expert reviewers are asked to review the structure of the interview, including the sequence of questions and the estimated time for the interview.

Expert Reviewer Feedback:

Please provide your feedback on the following aspects of the interview protocol:

1. **Interview Questions:** Are the questions clear, and relevant to the research objectives? Do you have any suggestions for improving the questions?
2. **Interview Structure:** Is the structure of the interview appropriate? Do you have any suggestions for improving the structure?

We would appreciate it if you could evaluate by selecting the relevant option on the Likert scale presented below.

Experts Validation (Data Analysis) 1



Experts Validation

Title of Study: Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Researcher: Wong Woen Sheng

Supervisor: Dr Anisah Zainab binti Musa

Purpose of Expert Validation

The purpose of this expert validation is to ensure the validity and reliability of the data analysis for the above-mentioned study. The expert validators are asked to provide their professional opinions and suggestions on the **themes, sub-themes, and interpretations**.

Procedures:

1. **Review of Data Analysis:** Experts review the alignment between participant statements and the assigned themes and sub-themes.
2. **Expert Validator Feedback:** After reviewing, please complete the forms below for each section. Experts may give feedback in open comment sections.
3. **Expert Validator Remarks:** If there is any suggestions, experts may leave your comment under the "remarks" column.



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.				/	
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.					/
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.				/	
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.				/	
<p>Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis?</p> <p>N/A</p>						



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.					/
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.					/
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.					/
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.					/
Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis? No						



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.				/	
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.				/	
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.				/	
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.				/	
Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis? No						

Experts Validation (Data Analysis) 2



Experts Validation

Title of Study: Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization among Youths in Malaysia

Researcher: Wong Woen Sheng

Supervisor: Dr Anisah Zainab binti Musa

Purpose of Expert Validation

The purpose of this expert validation is to ensure the validity and reliability of the data analysis for the above-mentioned study. The expert validators are asked to provide their professional opinions and suggestions on the **themes, sub-themes, and interpretations**.

Procedures:

1. **Review of Data Analysis:** Experts review the alignment between participant statements and the assigned themes and sub-themes.
2. **Expert Validator Feedback:** After reviewing, please complete the forms below for each section. Experts may give feedback in open comment sections.
3. **Expert Validator Remarks:** If there is any suggestions, experts may leave your comment under the "remarks" column.



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.			/		
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.				/	
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.				/	
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.				/	

Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis?

Please refer to my small comment for E56, P2.



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.				/	
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.				/	
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.				/	
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.				/	
<p>Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis?</p> <p>No.</p>						



Please rate the following statements based on your agreement level regarding the data analysis by ticking “ / ” the appropriate box:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	The sub-themes accurately represent the meaning in the participants' statements.				/	
2	The themes are clearly defined and distinct from one another.				/	
3	The participant quotes provide sufficient evidence to support the sub-themes and themes.				/	
4	The interpretations reflect the participants' perspectives without researcher bias.				/	
5	The identified themes sufficiently address the research question and research objective.				/	
<p>Do you have any recommendations that you would like to share regarding the data analysis?</p> <p>No.</p>						

Ethical Clearance Approval



UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN DU012(A)
Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation Co. No. 578227-M

Re: U/SERC/78-428/2025

7 January 2025

Dr Lee Wan Ying
Head, Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat
31900 Kampar, Perak.

Dear Dr Lee,

Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to the application for ethical approval for your students' research project from Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) Guidance and Counselling programme enrolled in course UAPC3083. We are pleased to inform you that the application has been approved under Expedited Review.

The details of the research projects are as follows:

No	Research Title	Student's Name	Supervisor's Name	Approval Validity
1.	Exploring the Experiences of Cyberbullying Victimization Among Youths in Malaysia	Wong Woen Sheng	Dr Anisah Zainab Binti Musa	7 January 2025 – 6 January 2026
2.	Self-efficacy, Coping Strategies and Perceived Social Support to Predict Depressive Symptoms in Malaysian University Students	Fionny Chee Zhi Ying		

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research;
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.
- (4) Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313
Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868
Website: www.utar.edu.my



Interview Transcript

1	Interviewer	Hi, good afternoon. Thank you for joining this interview. My name is Wong Woen Sheng and will be the interviewer for this research. Before we start the interview here is the informed consent. So, this informed consent includes some information that you may need to know. First, the purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of cyberbullying victimization among youths in Malaysia. This interview will be conducted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Also, you have the right to decline to participate or withdraw from their research at any time. The interview session will be audio recorded. However, your personal information and audio recording will be kept private and confidential. You can take your time to review the informed consent and sign here if you agree and understand the terms and conditions.
2	Interviewee	Ok
3	Interviewer	Let's start our interview session, so do you feel comfortable to start to share your personal experience about cyberbullying here?
4	Interviewee	Yes.
5	Interviewer	Okay. The first question is can you describe your experience of being cyberbullied?
6	Interviewee	Basically, I was 17 and there was this person who texted me online and I was very confused because I do not know this person, but they acted like they knew me. So I texted them back by asking "who are you", "what you want?". Then they told me, "this is your friend, right? If you continue talking to this person, I will come to look for you. I know where you live.."
7	Interviewer	So, it's like a threatening messages?
8	Interviewee	Yes...
9	Interviewer	The friend is someone who you know? And then the friend's friend is talking about if you keep continuing contact with the friends that you know, then the person will come to find you?
10	Interviewee	Yes
11	Interviewer	What makes the perpetrator come to find you and send this threatening message to you?
12	Interviewee	Because my friend was the reason he is a wanted criminal. The perpetrator asked my friend to do something, then my friend reported his crime. So, he is a wanted criminal, so basically his life was ruined because of my friend. He went into hiding and now he wants to revenge.

13	Interviewer	May I know what the perpetrator asked your friend to do?
14	Interviewee	The perpetrator asked my friend to take pictures of himself without any clothes and sent it to a girl on behalf of him.
15	Interviewer	Then, your friend went to make a report and made the perpetrator want to take revenge on your friend. So, the perpetrator messaged you to let you not continue contact with your friend with threatening messages, as a revenge to B?
16	Interviewee	Yes.
17	Interviewer	What messages does the perpetrator send to you? Can you share more examples with me?
18	Interviewee	He said, "I know where you live, I know your class, I know where you usually go to, I will come and look for you. I will kidnap you and I will rape you, if you continue talking to the friend"
19	Interviewer	May I know what is the platform where the perpetrator contacts you?
20	Interviewee	Facebook Messenger.

21	Interviewer	So, you do not know the perpetrator at all?
22	Interviewee	No.
23	Interviewer	Besides the threatening messages, any other messages or actions were involved in this bullying?
24	Interviewee	Basically, it went over cyberbullying because I saw him in person. But I ran away.
25	Interviewer	So, the perpetrator is actually someone around you and you saw the perpetrator in real life?
26	Interviewee	Yes.
27	Interviewer	May I know how long this cyberbully lasts?
28	Interviewee	A few weeks.
29	Interviewer	So, during the few weeks, the perpetrator keeps sending threatening messages to you?
30	Interviewee	Yes
31	Interviewer	Did the frequency of the cyberbullying change over time?
32	Interviewee	For the first few weeks, it was daily every night. After that, it dies down and becomes once a few days and then it stops.

33	Interviewer	When the perpetrator first contacted you, did you make any reply?
34	Interviewee	I reply “I was seeing what you want from me”, “I did not do anything to you”. Then, the perpetrator said “I don’t know? Maybe you can come out and we can have a drink together, then I’ll decide if I want to continue texting you or not”.
35	Interviewee	So, I was panicking, but I did not tell anyone.
36	Interviewer	Did you tell your friend about this?
37	Interviewee	Initially, I did not tell. Until after a week, only I told.
38	Interviewer	However, the cyberbullying did not stop after you told your friend?
39	Interviewee	Yes.
40	Interviewer	Did your friend tell you he has done any action after listening to your story?

41	Interviewee	My friend went to confront the perpetrator and ask him what he wanted. Then asking him to stop harassing me. But, it made the perpetrator more excited. So, he keeps sending me threatening messages.
42	Interviewer	May I know what were the most upsetting or difficult aspects of the cyberbullying experience for you?
43	Interviewee	The most upsetting was that I felt very helpless. It was like, I couldn’t go anywhere. So, I stayed at home for a lot of time. And, I felt like I couldn’t do anything about it. So, I could only live in fear.
44	Interviewer	As you mentioned just now, you have met the perpetrator in real life, was it during or after the cyberbullying?
45	Interviewee	During.
46	Interviewer	Where have you met the perpetrator?
47	Interviewee	Shopping mall that I go to a lot.
48	Interviewer	What did you feel at the moment when you saw the perpetrator?
49	Interviewee	I was terrified. The perpetrator did not see me, so I ran away.
50	Interviewer	Were there specific messages or behaviours that were particularly upsetting?
51	Interviewee	Yes. The most upsetting part was, what the perpetrator said was “I want to make your friend feel alone in life, because I’m alone right now”. And then he said that there are other people that he already texted to leave my friend’s life, and they did so. So he said if you don’t leave him, I will come and kidnap you.

52	Interviewer	From what you have said, there are two kinds of messages. Did the upsetting part about you knowing that some people are leaving your friend after being threatened by the perpetrator, or the threatening messages to you?
53	Interviewee	I think it was both very upsetting, but in different ways. If the part where I leave my friends, it will make me feel guilty. But, if I don't do so, the kidnap part is making me feel terrifying.
54	Interviewer	So, actually both of the messages are making you feel particularly upset in different ways. What were the specific moments or incidents that felt particularly overwhelming?
55	Interviewee	I think the overwhelming moment was when the perpetrator started texting me about where I stay, who my close friends are. I think he has friends in our schools that could get information on us. He does not know my exact house, but he knows the area. So scary.
56	Interviewer	How did the actions of bystanders, such as liking, sharing, or commenting, affect your emotions or perception of the situation?
57	Interviewee	I feel like the bystanders are some people I told in private and they just told me to relax, asked me to stop caring about it, and said something like "he would not do anything". But, in my situation, I felt very scared. So, when I told them about the situation, I felt that no one understood me.
58	Interviewer	How did you feel when the cyberbullying incidents happened?
59	Interviewee	When I received the message, I initially felt stunned. I would think that it's just nothing, I don't need to care about this. But then the perpetrator started telling me about my personal information, what they wanted to do, then it was fear and then anxiety.
60	Interviewer	So, the feelings have changed from stunned at first to fear and anxiety when the perpetrator started texting your personal information to you. Can you describe more about the emotional responses you experienced?
61	Interviewee	I was panicking and shaking, because it was very scary and crazy. Basically, all I could do was cry.
62	Interviewer	Did your feelings change as the bullying continued?
63	Interviewee	Yes. It started with fear and anxiety, then it turned into anger. Because it was like none of my business, I was wondering why this is happening to me.
64	Interviewer	Were there specific events that heightened your emotional reactions?
65	Interviewee	I think when they told me all the personal information and when I saw the perpetrator in real life. The feelings of fear and anxiety had become more

		intense and were heightened when I saw the perpetrator. I am afraid that he may do something to me.
66	Interviewer	How has cyberbullying affected your emotional or mental well-being?
67	Interviewee	I became very scared of going out. A lot of my usual activities that I would do, such as going to a library, I couldn't do because I couldn't step out of my place. Yeah, so I spent months even after the cyberbullying and couldn't go out.
68	Interviewer	So, this cyberbullying event has also impacted you even after it is over. Were there moments when you felt emotionally overwhelmed or numb?
69	Interviewee	Yes, like I mentioned, he texts me at night. So when the frequency started getting less and less, I was expecting a text at every night. It's like, I am thinking about "when is the text coming in?". So, I couldn't sleep because I was waiting for that text.
70	Interviewer	How about the feelings of numb?
71	Interviewee	I think it is a yes and no. I started getting used to it, but the feelings of fear and anxiety are still there.
72	Interviewer	Have you noticed any changes in your behaviour or habits after experiencing cyberbullying?
73	Interviewee	Yes, I stopped going out, because I know that he has people in my school that can give him my information. I stopped talking to a lot of people because I don't know who the people are. So my social circle became very, very, very small and close friends that I used to have, I stopped talking to them. So I had less friends and I stopped posting on social media. I deleted a lot of things from my Facebook account because he messaged me there. and I privated every single thing. So, if that person is not my friend, you can't see anything, not even my name. and even Instagram, everything, I stopped posting.
74	Interviewer	Are these actions driven by fear and anxiety or any other feelings?
75	Interviewee	Fear and anxiety. And also prevention, because I don't know when it will happen next.
76	Interviewer	Do you start avoiding specific online platforms or social situations?
77	Interviewee	Yes. I stopped using Facebook completely. I will just contact my close, close, close friends using Messenger, but other than that I do not use Facebook at all. For Instagram, I deleted all of my posts, even you can't see my face in my profile picture. It was until years later that I started posting.
78	Interviewer	So, actually it has big impacts on how you use social media. Did you change the way you communicate with others online or offline?

79	Interviewee	Yes, I became very reserved, and I don't share a lot of my thoughts or even information to people that I feel like it's not necessary to. It was because I was scared that the person may share my information with the perpetrator. Also, I was scared that this kind of thing would happen again, even if it was not the same person.
80	Interviewer	Have you developed new habits, positive or negative, as a result of the experience?

81	Interviewee	Yes, I became a lot more protective about my own privacy. So, I will not open up to people until I met them for a very, very long time. I don't really use social media anymore, very, very seldom. I only scroll through social media but not post anything. Do you have if this new habit that developed is more towards positive or negative?
82	Interviewer	Do you perceive this new habit that developed is more towards positive or negative?
83	Interviewee	It could be both, but I feel like for me personally, it is more towards positive. It is because I will feel safer. But if other people were saying "why don't you post or share more things", I will tell them I don't feel it's necessary. But actually I was thinking that what if someone follows me to the place if I share it on the Internet.
84	Interviewer	Before the cyberbullying events happened, were you a person who often shared on your social media?
85	Interviewee	Yes, before this, I used to post almost weekly. I will post about where I am, this food tasted very good.
86	Interviewer	How did you feel after noticing this change?
87	Interviewee	Initially, it was surprising about being very different from who I was. Thinking that this incident changed me as a person. I used to be very outgoing and very friendly to everyone. But after that, I became very reserved and more introverted than I really was. But now, I am really used to this kind of lifestyle and accepting this is who I am right now.
88	Interviewer	Okay. For the next question, did you experience physical symptoms such as stress-related illnesses as a result of being cyberbullied?
89	Interviewee	Yeah, I had headaches almost every hour. If I wasn't doing anything, I would have headaches. And if I'm doing something, even my eyes would feel very strange and feel like my eyes would burst. Also, I couldn't eat and sleep. If I ate something, even just one bite, I would want to vomit.
90	Interviewer	What do you think that may trigger you to have the physical symptoms?
91	Interviewee	In my mind, I did not connect the dots I experienced because of this incident. But, after the cyberbullying event died down and after months

		went by, the physical symptoms stopped. So I was wondering if maybe it was because of that.
92	Interviewer	How did the experience of cyberbullied influence your relationship with friends and family?
93	Interviewee	Yes. I became very distant to people around me, even close friends, and my family. Even until today, my family does not know what happened during that time. There are only two friends that I stopped talking to during that time that I reconnected with recently. And only then they knew what happened. So they were very confused and thought that I hated them. So, I realized that I gave people the impression that I stopped talking to them because I hated them. They told me that in their circle back then, they were discussing that I have changed and wondering if I have any negative feelings towards them and hate them. So, they also stop talking to me. But it wasn't that. So, I realized I gave people the impression that I hated them. So, it's not only me becoming distant from them, but they are also distancing themselves from me.
94	Interviewer	What is their reaction after you tell them the stories?
95	Interviewee	They were shocked because they did not realize what was happening at that moment, and they also asked why I did not tell them for help. But I explained that I didn't think that you could do anything. So I did not say anything.
96	Interviewer	What do you feel when you tell your stories to them?
97	Interviewee	I felt guilty and also a lot of regret. because I lost a lot of years of contact with them just because of this small, like, I wouldn't say a small issue, but now I look back it's a small issue. But during that time it was a big issue for me. So I felt a lot of regret.
98	Interviewer	So the next question, do you feel more isolated or withdraw from those around you?
99	Interviewee	Yes, very isolated and withdrawn. Withdrawing because of myself, but isolated because of both ways.
100	Interviewer	Did the experience change how you trust or communicate with people?
101	Interviewee	Yes, a lot. I became very careful and felt I had a very big struggle towards talking to people or opening up to people. I used to work part time, but I couldn't do that also because I didn't know who I would meet at my job.
102	Interviewer	How did you initially react to the cyberbullying incidents?
103	Interviewee	I think it was shocking at first because of thinking “why is this happening to me”. I only see this in movies, so I did not know how to respond. It took awhile to process what was going on and then I was also

		very scared that how I responded would make things worse. So I felt very stuck.
104	Interviewer	Did you eventually reply to the perpetrator?
105	Interviewee	Yes, I replied to him "Who are you?" "What do you want from me?". In my text it looked like I was very confident and I wasn't scared of that person, but in my head, I'm thinking about "How should I respond? How should I respond?" with the feeling of fear and anxiety.
106	Interviewer	What emotions influence your initial reaction at that moment?
107	Interviewee	I felt scared for my friend because if that person could text me something like that, what would they do to the person that actually hurt them? So, I tried to tell myself to be calm and think to reply to the perpetrator without making things get worse. So it was a very big contradiction with how I was actually feeling, which is that I was very scared and anxious. So, I felt like I had to shut off this fear and anxiety for a moment, but it was still happening in the back of my head and I tried to reply to the perpetrator calmly.
108	Interviewer	What other actions did you take to address or stop the cyberbullying?
109	Interviewee	I didn't really do anything other than that because I was scared of retaliation and thinking of what they would do if they found out that I told someone else. Because they also told me that if they find out, then they will make things worse. So I was very scared.
110	Interviewer	Do you have any ways to cope with the emotional strain that you have mentioned just now, such as fear and anxiety?
111	Interviewee	I told one person during that time that understood me, but they couldn't really do anything. Other than that, I just started drawing and journaling.
112	Interviewer	Do you think it was effective or helpful in managing your emotions?
113	Interviewee	I don't think it was helpful for managing my emotions, but I could see physically what was happening. Because my drawings were very, very dark.
114	Interviewer	Did you think the cyberbullying event had triggered you to draw your painting darkly?
115	Interviewee	Yeah, I think overwhelming emotion because I didn't really have an outlet, I could only handle it myself. So it was very dark because of that.
116	Interviewer	What makes you just seek help from only one friend?
117	Interviewee	Because the perpetrator told me that they would know if I told someone, so they would immediately come to my place and kidnap me.

118	Interviewer	So, you are afraid that they will come to kidnap you if you told someone else?
119	Interviewee	Yes. The perpetrator also told me that they have something with them that could ruin my friend's life. So, if they found out that I told someone else, they would share the things online and ruin my friend's life.
120	Interviewer	So, you are also afraid that it will ruin your friend's life then you keep silent. Did you consider telling your family members about this event at that moment?
121	Interviewee	No, because during that time they were struggling with other stuff. So I did not feel I should add on to their burden. Until now they did not know about this story.
122	Interviewer	Have you considered telling them about these issues?
123	Interviewee	I think even if I tell them I would just tell them like a storytelling. I would not tell them that I felt very scared at that moment, I would just say what was happened to me.
124	Interviewer	Have you considered seeking help from teacher at that moment?
125	Interviewee	The perpetrator is much older than me, so we are not in the same school. So, I don't think that it will be helpful to tell the teacher.
126	Interviewer	Have you considered seeking help from professionals?
127	Interviewee	No. I think I felt even if I told them, what could they do? They can't do anything. And even if they asked me to call the police, I would say no, because I was scared about what would happen after that.
128	Interviewer	From what you have mentioned, the coping strategies that you have used were less helpful in managing your emotional strain. Then, what have you done when the emotional strain occurs?
129	Interviewee	I didn't think I have done much about my emotions, but just let it simmer out. So, I think this is one of the reasons that I don't really post anything after this. Maybe I did not focus on processing my emotions at that moment, so I continue on with them.
130	Interviewer	Did you feel that it is unhelpful or harmful if you did not process your own emotion?
131	Interviewee	Yes. If I had a chance to meet 17 years old me, I would just ask myself to talk to someone even if they can't do anything, because I was isolating myself from everybody. I will feel much better if I can talk to someone.
132	Interviewer	However, you have mentioned that you think it is unhelpful after you told your friend about the story. What will you do differently to make it more effective?

133	Interviewee	I think I overgeneralized everyone's reactions. One person that does not understand me does not mean that other people wouldn't understand me, because I have found a person that understands me. So, if I have tried to talk to more people, there may be someone that can help me to figure out the ways to help me that I couldn't think about myself. Maybe an adult? Since who I told to were mostly teenagers.
134	Interviewer	Did you engage in any actions, such as retaliating or substance use, to cope with the cyberbullying?
135	Interviewee	No.
136	Interviewer	Are there specific actions you regret not taking sooner?
137	Interviewee	I could have called the police because this is a very serious threat that they really told me all my personal information. I could have called the police and things could be handled way easier. And the person is using Facebook, they can check this IP address and everything. But I did not think about that. So if I look back to that time I would have just called the police and told them about this.
138	Interviewer	Is there anything you think is important for me to know that we haven't discussed yet?
139	Interviewee	Not really.
140	Interviewer	Looking back at today's conversation, is there anything you would like to add or clarify?
141	Interviewee	Maybe I can add something. The perpetrator is eight years older than me. So, the situation was terrifying because it was an adult threatening a teenager. So, it has made the situation worse.
142	Interviewer	What are your thoughts or feelings after discussing these topics today?
143	Interviewee	I feel like I haven't looked back on this experience for a very, very long time. So looking back I'm wondering if I can handle the situation better. But, eventually I have to accept that things happened and that was my experience and past is past.
144	Interviewer	I am glad that you have realized that things have happened and the past is past. Thank you for sharing with me your experience. Bye Bye.
145	Interviewee	You are welcome. Bye Bye.

Data Analysis

RO1:	To examine the ways in which victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying.			
RQ1:	How do victims of cyberbullying perceive strain due to the cyberbullying?			
Extracts	Participants	Statements	Sub-themes	Themes
E51, E53	P1	"The most upsetting part was, what the perpetrator said was "I want to make your friend feel alone in life, because I'm alone right now"... he said if you don't leave him, I will come and kidnap you. If the part where I leave my friends, it will make me feel guilty."	Self-blame and Guilt	Strain Originating from the Victims
E16	P2	At first, when there are just several people involved in cyberbullying, we strongly believe that we are doing the right things. However, when the perpetrators become more and more, we start to wonder if it is our fault, are our rules too strict?		
E30, E52	P3	"I felt regret because I should not send him my photos in the first place...I will judge myself a lot more since I have made this stupid decision. "		
E56	P2	Firstly, I thought that there may be a misunderstanding or miscommunication. So, I tried to let the perpetrators know more about our efforts put in the server, wondering if they will change and stop their behavior. But unfortunately, no.	Unreciprocated Emotional Investment	
E22	P6	I felt wronged because I only wanted to be friends with them, but in the end, my sincerity and genuineness was not reciprocated, and I was made fun of. I had no ill intentions.		
E43	P1	"The most upsetting was that I felt very helpless. It was like, I couldn't go anywhere. So, I stayed at home for a lot of time. And, I felt like I couldn't do anything about it. So, I could only live in fear."	Helplessness	

E6	P5	I felt helpless and didn't know how to explain things in a way that would make them believe me.		
E51, E53	P1	"So he said if you don't, I will come and kidnap you...making me feel terrifying. "	Threats, Coercion, and Harassment	Strain Originating from the Perpetrators
E6, E20	P2	"Our pictures are being edited inappropriately (with dicks) using Photoshop." "He makes fun of my body, attacks my parents, and sends inappropriate messages (Do you want to suck my dick?) and photos (dick photos) to me."		
E18	P3	At first I rejected his requests to have sex texting. However, he was very pushy and threatened me that if I do not do this, then he will share my videos with other people. Because we have added each other as friends on Facebook, he threatened me that he will send it to my followers on Facebook one by one. So, I got scared and complied with him.		
E51	P1	"The most upsetting part was, what the perpetrator said was "I want to make your friend feel alone in life, because I'm alone right now."	Emotional Manipulation	
E22	P3	At first, he kept propagating himself as a good Christian boy and made me believe in him. After this, he was telling me that sexting and exchanging naked photos are what friends do. At First I was questioning and doubting it, but he kept pushing me to do it and eventually I fell for it.		
E14	P6	I remember there was a time when one of the perpetrators came and texted me that she wanted to be friends with me. At that moment, I was shocked and really happy. I replied to her "really?" and she told me that it was a punishment for truth or dare, so asking me as a friend is one of their dare. Then, she said that I was silly to believe her at first. So, I was sad.		
E34	P1	"He said, 'I know where you live, I know your class, I know where you usually go to, I will come and look for you. I will kidnap you and I will rape you, if you continue talking to the friend.'"	Privacy Violations	
E6	P5	"Most of my social media was hacked by the perpetrator, including Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and Wechat. He also disclosed my		

		private information on my university Facebook page including my address, phone number, identity card number. He also used my account to call my university presidents and other teachers."		
E26	P4	I felt particularly overwhelmed the moment they shared my photos on Facebook to make fun of me. Also, the comments below the posts are also overwhelming for me. They are commenting about my appearances and trying to make fun of me. Some were just trying to label me as something bad like a dog or something.	Public Shaming and Mockery	
E7	P5	The second bullying incident started when a clip of my speech from a debate competition was maliciously edited and taken out of context, then posted on a Facebook group. As a result, I was flooded with criticism and harsh insults from many people.		
E6	P6	"I also make some effort in commenting on their posts frequently...At that time, maybe they felt annoyed by my actions, so they tried to make fun of me on the Internet."		
E6	P2	"They just don't even care what reason gives and just attack you, and they even create an alternate account... using the bots to spam in the server to try to bring the server down."	Group and Repetitive Aggression	
E6, E24	P4	They will post my photos on Facebook and make fun of my photos. Also, they created a Messenger group chat and added me into the group then sent something not friendly to me. I felt uncomfortable with people laughing at me, especially when they were making fun of my photos.		
E22	P6	The most upsetting part would be I genuinely wanted to be friends with them and I really looked up to them, thinking that they are really cool and I wanted to be part of it. But it turns out I was being made fun of. "I would say there are no specific messages or behaviours, but the accumulation of all these actions gradually caused me to feel upset."		
E14	P2	When I tried to make friends with them but failed, I felt particularly upset. At first, I think there is a miscommunication or misunderstanding that has made them start cyberbullying. So, instead of blaming them, I tried to	Betrayal	

		communicate with them politely first...So, I felt disappointed when they did it again and again after I tried to communicate with them.		
E6	P3	I was made to believe there is someone who really loves me but actually doesn't.		
E32	P3	One specific moment is when I told my friends about this incident and they just asked me to chill and said that it was just harassment, he would not share it.	Lack of Support and Invalidating Reactions	Strain Originating from Significant Others
E15	P5	"They became frustrated, complained, and even started to suspect that I was making it all up." "...my parents couldn't understand and gave me unhelpful advice like "turn off your phone" or "get a new phone." There was even one time when the perpetrator told me he was standing outside my door. I woke up scared and went to my dad for help. He got so angry and smashed my phone, saying I was being paranoid. What upset me the most was that the people around me couldn't understand or empathize with me; instead, they blamed me."		
E107	P1	I felt scared for my friend because if that person could text me something like that, what would they do to the person that actually hurt them?	Witnessing Significant Others in Distress	
E12	P2	I think most of them are about my friend. As I mentioned just now, she has anxiety after this incident and has several times want to commit suicide...This is the most upsetting aspect for me. When my friend was being affected by cyberbullying, I could not do anything to help.		
E16	P5	I also felt deeply upset for those who were affected, including my boyfriend and teammates.		

RO2:	To explore the impacts of cyberbullying on victims.			
RQ2:	What are the impacts of cyberbullying on victims?			
Extracts	Participants	Statements	Sub-themes	Themes
E59	P1	"... then the perpetrator started telling me about my personal information, what they wanted to do, then it was fear and then anxiety. "	Fear, Anxiety and Panic	Emotional Impacts
E24	P2	"These emotions are because of my friend. Since this incident has affected her a lot, I am afraid that her condition will become worse."		
E40	P3	"There is one of my friends had a similar incident with me. After this incident, everyone was boycotting her, which I do not think is fair because sometimes it is not what you wanted. So, it makes me more anxious because what if my videos and photos are being leaked. "		
E30	P4	"I felt scared because suddenly there were a lot of people posting and commenting about me, even adding me to a group chat to attack me. "		
E21	P5	"It felt like the perpetrator was monitoring me 24/7, knowing every move I made...No matter where I was — at home or at university — he seemed to always know my whereabouts, which scared me."		
E36	P6	"Before I realized it was cyberbullying, I was feeling anxious about how to reply to them so they would accept me as friends and let me join them." "After I realized it was cyberbullying, I felt anxious about how I could react and handle the situation..."		
E24	P2	"I think my feelings went numb, not as strong as the previous time... as the incidents continued, I just thought that 'Okay, here comes again.'"	Numbness	
E46	P3	"For a very long time, this incident hurt me and I will cry at midnight every day. But, after this, I just went numb as the incident continued."		
E18, E51	P5	"Over time, I began to accept it and even got used to being harassed in the middle of the night. I became numb to it." "I gradually became numb and started getting used to that kind of life."		

E54	P3	"I was depressed and cried a lot when I was worrying about the videos or photos getting leaked."	Depression and Sadness	
E30	P4	"After processing all of these things, I felt sad because they are saying something bad to me."		
E19	P5	"The biggest emotion I felt during this incident was sadness, because I couldn't continue with the debate competition...it affected the thing I loved most — debating — and caused harm to my teammates as well."		
E24	P6	"When I found out that there are some people that I don't even know have blocked me on Facebook and the intensity of being made fun of were becoming higher, like they started spreading the rumors saying that I am weird and do not be friends with me, then I realized that it was cyberbullying." "I felt sad and disappointed, but this was after I realized a few months later."		
E63	P1	"...then it turned into anger. Because it was like none of my business, I was wondering why this is happening to me."	Anger	
E34	P4	"At first, I also felt angry. I do not know why they have the right to judge me because they are the one who did something wrong so I was just doing my job to report to the disciplinary department. I did not do anything that is immoral."		
E18, E39	P5	"At first, I was angry and wanted to find out who was behind it." "In the beginning, I had a short temper and little patience. When the bullying first started... my immediate thought was to fight back — I didn't want to just stay silent and endure it."		
E97	P1	"I felt guilty and also a lot of regret. because I lost a lot of years of contact with them... during that time it was a big issue for me."	Guilt	
E30	P3	"I felt regret because I should not send him my photos in the first place."		
E19	P5	"...I couldn't continue with the debate competition. I had to let my juniors take my place to face the tough opponents. I felt regretful, but there was nothing I could do. I just couldn't handle all the eyes on me in such a tense		

		situation. It felt like the whole world was waiting for me to fail, so I chose to back out. "		
E43	P1	The most upsetting was that I felt very helpless. It was like, I couldn't go anywhere. So, I stayed at home for a lot of time. And, I felt like I couldn't do anything about it. So, I could only live in fear.	Helplessness	
E18	P2	"First, I felt shocked and helpless, and did not know what to do. It was the first time I have experienced being treated maliciously."		
E43	P3	"Feeling helpless is because I tried to tell someone, but it cannot change the reality that I have already sent the videos and photos. At that time still not invented the "unsend" button. Even after I told my friends, they will just ask me to be chill, making me feel more helpless and not being understood. "		
E18, E6	P5	"...the strongest emotion I felt was helplessness. I didn't know how to solve the situation, and even now, I still don't know who the bully is. I tried many different ways to resolve it. I attempted to negotiate with the bully, which only made others think I was having a mental breakdown" "I felt helpless and didn't know how to explain things in a way that would make them believe me."		
E73	P1	"I stopped going out, because I know that he has people in my school that can give him my information." "My social circle became very, very, very small and close friends that I used to have, I stopped talking to them."	Social Withdrawal and Isolation	Behavioural Impacts
E42	P2	I will think that since I grew up, I did not go along with friends anymore and tend to live alone and stay with myself. But now, after reflecting on this incident, I think that I have brought some of the ways that I survived in the online settings to reality. I did not make a lot of friends in reality.		
E62, E68	P3	"I would not share too much with others as before and become more introverted...sometimes you talk to them then they seem like they do not care about it...I will be afraid that if I share more, what if the person may whisper and spread it around."		

E24, E36	P4	"I didn't even go outside with my family members because I was scared to be recognized..." "I became more introverted... I do not dare to make friends... my social circle is small with just a few friends."		
E25	P5	"I avoided appearing in the debate competition and not attending any of it anymore."		
E59	P6	I would sense that there is a distance even between my close friends. I won't actively approach my secondary school close friend. I think it is getting better now, but sometimes it will reappear again and I do not know why.		
E73	P1	"I stopped posting on social media. I deleted a lot of things from my Facebook account... even Instagram, everything, I stopped posting."	Online Disengagement and Avoidance	
E48	P3	"I have deleted the Facebook app and even my Facebook account... I do not play Tinder anymore after this."		
E38	P4	"I reduced my frequency of posting online at that time because I was afraid of being judged by them."		
E25	P5	"For online platform...I avoided using it because they said something bad to me and were attacking me...But, after this I still can use the online platform but will be noticing myself to be more cautious."		
E40, E44	P6	"I did not post anything again online because I was afraid that there would be someone who would screenshot and talk about me..." "I stop commenting on others' posts as before. It is because I am afraid that they will think I am annoying..."		
E87, E79	P1	I used to be very outgoing and very friendly to everyone. But after that, I became very reserved and more introverted than I really was... I don't share a lot of my thoughts or even information to people that I feel like it's not necessary to."	Change in Communication Style	
E30	P2	I am not as friendly as before. On the internet, I am not as talkative and friendly as I am in reality. I talk less because I do not want anyone to find the chance to attack me.		

E62	P3	"I would be more cautious when communicating with others. Also, I would not be as friendly as before."		
E25, E27	P5	"when interacting with others, I constantly remind myself to be cautious, to not share everything with people." "I started feeling like people were always observing me, which made me very conscious of my words and actions, always trying to be extra careful."		
E17, E25	P5	"The controversy caused by it was so intense that I decided to back out and quit the competition because I didn't know how to face it and couldn't bring myself to prepare for the match. The hardest part was missing out on a rare opportunity for a university competition." "I avoided appearing in the debate competition and not attending any of it anymore."	Changes in Life Choices	
E32	P6	"As I mentioned before, girls in my primary school can straight up go to the secondary school under the same organization without looking at the results. At first, I intended to go to this secondary school. However, this incident became the major reason that I gave up going to this secondary school because I did not want to meet them again."		
E92	P1	"There are only two friends that I stopped talking to during that time...They were very confused and thought that I hated them... So, they also stop talking to me."	Friendship breakdown	Relationship Impacts
E38	P2	"I did not contact them anymore... I am afraid that they will take advantage of me as admin."		
E68	P3	"For friends, sometimes you talk to them then they seem like they do not care about it. So, I am wondering why I need to continue talking to the person."		
E44	P4	"There are some friends that have changed after this incident. Because they have other friends who dislike me, they just choose to leave me and do not make friends with me anymore. "		
E30, E34	P5	"When the bullying first started, my roommates didn't understand what was happening — some even began to suspect that I had a split personality or that I was faking everything. I felt deeply disappointed and confused,		

		wondering why even the people closest to me would think that way...I also stopped talking about it with my roommates. "		
E45	P4	"The relationship with my family members have become closer after the incident. At that time, my mother noticed my emotional changes and asked me about what was happening. So, I just told them about the incidents and we became closer."	Changes in Family Dynamics	
E37, E31, E34	P5	"...my mother failed to understand me and even blamed me for it...my father even smashed my phone, thinking I was just being paranoid." "After realizing I couldn't expect understanding, comfort, or practical support from them, I began to only share good news and keep the bad to myself."		
E101	P1	"I became very careful and felt I had a very big struggle towards talking to people or opening up to people."	Trust Issues	
E30	P2	We found it was difficult to trust people. In reality, we can have the instinct to know if the person is good or bad by observation. However, online, we will not know who the person will harm us.		
E76	P3	"I become more careful with how I speak to a person, especially to those who are just met. It is because they might use it against you."		
E51	P4	"Since I cannot exactly know how a person feels about me. They may still be able to talk to you but they can also dislike you at the same time. So, I found it hard to trust people."		
E36	P5	"This incident caused a breakdown of trust between me and my roommates... Once they stopped trusting me, I found it hard to trust them too."		
E59	P6	I will be more careful who I befriend. I carefully select the circle of friends. When I sense that someone dislikes me or is not sincere enough to become my friend, then I will just walk away. I think that this is unhealthy. But, I do not want to get hurt anymore.		
E69	P1	"Yes, like I mentioned, he texts me at night. So when the frequency started getting less and less, I was expecting a text at every night. It's like, I am	Hypervigilance and Overthinking	Cognitive Impacts

		thinking about ‘when is the text coming in?’ So, I couldn't sleep because I was waiting for that text.”		
E36	P3	“Any notification from Facebook, my first thought was wondering if the perpetrator is texting me again.”		
E27	P5	"I constantly felt anxious and paranoid, like someone was stalking me or that everyone’s eyes were on me. I became obsessed with checking how others viewed me."		
E40	P6	"I became very cautious and vigilant when I made or added friends with someone. I was afraid that I would add or make friends with someone who is their friend so they could talk about me again."		
E16	P2	At first, when there are just several people involved in cyberbullying, we strongly believe that we are doing the right things. However, when the perpetrators become more and more, we start to wonder if it is our fault, are our rules too strict?	Negative Self-Appraisal	
E44	P3	"I will wonder if I am worthy to be helped by them. Because I am the one who chooses to send the videos and photos to the perpetrator."		
E53	P5	"I began overanalyzing everything, blaming myself, and questioning my own personality or character.I kept wondering why something like this happened to me and whether I was somehow annoying enough for someone to treat me this way"		
E89,E91	P1	"Also, I couldn't eat and sleep...after the cyberbullying event died down and after months went by, the physical symptoms stopped. "	Sleep Disturbance	Physical Impacts
E64	P3	“I will think about a lot of things... and it led me to trouble sleeping for a few months.”		
E27	P5	"For about two years, I often experienced insomnia due to anxiety. Even when I managed to fall asleep, I would frequently wake up in fear."		
E89	P1	If I ate something, even just one bite, I would want to vomit.”	Appetite Issues	

E102	P3	“Stop eating for two weeks...because I was too sad until no mood to eat...I started to feel faint and hand shaking when holding a pen, even writing is a hard thing for me... I just started eating.”		
E28	P5	My appetite was also affected, especially in the early stages of the incident. I often lost interest in food and couldn't eat properly because of my low mood.		
E89	P1	“Yeah, I had headaches almost every hour.If I wasn't doing anything, I would have headaches. And if I'm doing something, even my eyes would feel very strange and feel like my eyes would burst.”	Stress-Related Physical Symptoms	
E66	P3	“Body pain without knowing the reason.”		
E28	P5	"The lack of sleep gave me frequent headaches, making it difficult to focus in class." "Eventually, the poor appetite also led to stomach pain."		

RO3:	To investigate the coping strategies employed by cyberbullying victims in response to the strain they experienced.			
RQ3:	What coping strategies do victims of cyberbullying employed in response to the strain they experienced?			
Extracts	Participants	Statements	Sub-themes	Themes
E111,E113	P1	"I just started drawing and journaling." "I don't think it was helpful for managing my emotions, but I could see physically what was happening.	Emotional Expression & Release	Adaptive coping
E86	P3	"I joined co curricular activities like sports.I feel more relieved in a sense... it feels like releasing all the anger."		
E48	P5	"I mostly coped by listening to music and letting everything out through a good cry. After crying, I'd usually feel more clear-headed and rational."		
E8	P2	"Since the perpetrators were banned and kicked out from our server, they found that they cannot do anything to us on Discord." "We have reported all the accounts on Discord and written a letter to Discord to complain about it."	Problem-Focused Coping	
E48, E50	P3	"I deleted and blocked the perpetrator on Facebook...he did not reach out to me anymore after this."		
E53, E55	P4	" I felt angry and took screenshots of what the perpetrators had done and reported it to the teacher. But this method did not really work and made it more intense and more people disliked me...I think it has reduced because some of them may be afraid of being punished by teacher. "		
E34, E57	P6	"Eventually I deleted and blocked them and never chatted with them again." "When my feelings of anxiety and fear reached a certain point, I just decided to unfriend, block and delete all of them at once."		
E111	P1	"I told one person during that time that understood me, but they couldn't really do anything."	Social Support	
E36, E64	P2	"I have developed a strong bond with the server owner since we have gone through this incident together as victims. Before that, we weren't that close to each other. But after this, we often chat together and there is nothing we		

		will hide from each other...She is quite supportive and she comforted me when I started to wonder if these were our faults. She will ask me to focus on myself, and not get affected by the perpetrators. ”		
E48, E90	P3	“I reached out to my friend and told her about this. She comforted me to let me not be worried because they may not know that was me.” “I sought help from a clinical psychologist... effective in developing more understanding about myself including determining my own trigger point, what affects me the most and how my emotions get triggered. Another effective way is in changing my thoughts by noticing that this is not my fault.”		
E57, E71	P4	“So, my mother comforted my feelings and provided support to me.” “There are other friends who can relate to my feelings so we talked a lot... This made me feel understood and relieved.”		
E48, E49	P5	"My boyfriend played a big role in supporting me during that time... helped me find ways to respond to the situation, which made me feel better emotionally." "I was also really touched by the rational netizens who defended me and spoke up—they brought me a sense of warmth amidst everything."		
E75	P6	“There was a time I spent with my juniors after this incident. At that time, I have received some emotional support and let me not focus on the incident too much.” “When I realized that I have friends in school, that made me feel better.”		
E20	P2	“I kept comforting and telling myself that this wasn’t my fault... My negative feelings have changed into more positive, by thinking that they are so funny.”	Self-Talk	
E96	P3	“Last time, I used to listen to music, but it makes the situation worse. It is because of the lyrics of the song that I listened to. Most of the songs are talking about blaming myself such as “I am the one who created the wrong” and “I am trash”. At that time, I had a playlist with all of these kinds of songs. Then, my mood fluctuates a lot at that time. ”	Self-Blame and Internalization	Maladaptive Coping

E53	P5	"I began overanalyzing everything, blaming myself, and questioning my own personality or character. I kept wondering why something like this happened to me and whether I was somehow annoying enough for someone to treat me this way"		
E102	P3	"Excessive exercise. I started dancing just after I woke up in the morning, until 5am while everyone was asleep... I stopped when I realized my weight drop from 50+kg to 40+kg, which I realized that it is not healthy."	Risky Behaviour or Attempt	
E28, E77	P4	"I even think to commit suicide at that time. But after that, I just let go...At the beginning, I just want them to feel regret or scared and know that their actions can kill someone. However, I think that they were not worth it so I stopped the thought. "		
E40, E51	P5	"Out of desperation, I threatened him, saying I was standing on the balcony — was that what he wanted, for me to jump? I had already exhausted every rational option I could think of..." "When someone is pushed to their limit and nothing seems to work...those dark thoughts can start to surface."		
E72	P2	"There was one time I knew the perpetrator was joining back... So, I just banned them without reason."	Ineffective Conflict Management	
E129	P1	"I didn't think I have done much about my emotions, but just let it simmer out. So, I think this is one of the reasons that I don't really post anything after this. Maybe I did not focus on processing my emotions at that moment, so I continue on with them."	Suppression	
E60	P2	"For me, the emotional part is not the first thing that we need to focus on at that moment. We have a lot of things to work on, such as explaining to the members, apologizing to them, developing strategies to stop, kicking and banning the perpetrators. So, I have no time to think about the emotions and I don't even have time to cry."		
E38, E75	P6	"I did process all of the incident, but the processing of the emotional part was lacking." "Also, I was grown in a family which did not allow us to		

		express sadness. So, whenever I felt sad, I would tell myself “is ok it will be fine”. "		
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