

## Exploring Gender Based Difference in Cyberbullying and Self-Esteem - Review Study

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### ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social media and online communication has led to a significant increase in cyberbullying, with far-reaching consequences for individuals' self-esteem. Despite growing concerns, research on cyberbullying and self-esteem has yielded mixed results, and the role of gender in this context remains poorly understood. A knowledge gap is identified, and this study aims to address it by exploring gender-based differences in the relationship between cyberbullying and self-esteem. A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. A survey will be administered to a sample of adolescents and young adults to gather quantitative data on cyberbullying experiences, self-esteem, and demographic characteristics. Semi-structured interviews will also be conducted with a subsample of participants to gather more in-depth, qualitative insights into their experiences. This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on cyberbullying and self-esteem by providing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between these variables, with a particular focus on gender-based differences. Important implications for the development of targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem are expected to be identified. Evidence-based approaches to promoting healthy online interactions and emotional well-being will be informed by shedding light on the ways in which cyberbullying affects self-esteem differently for males and females.

**Keywords:** *Cyberbullying, Self-Esteem, Gender*

### CYBERBULLYING

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized global communication, enabling the world to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid shift to online platforms has facilitated remote work, e-commerce, and social connections, transforming the way people live, work, and interact. However, this increased reliance on digital technologies has also exacerbated the negative aspects of the online world, particularly cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, a form of aggressive behaviour that intentionally causes harm or discomfort, has been made more pervasive by the anonymity of the internet. The use of technology to repeatedly harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, or intimidate another person is facilitated by text messages, social media, online forums, or

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Received: April 21, 2025; Revision Received: May 09, 2025; Accepted: May 12, 2025

gaming platforms. The anonymity of the internet has been used to hide behind masks and perpetrate harm. The consequences of cyberbullying have been severe, ranging from emotional distress and anxiety to suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Several high-profile cases of adolescent suicides linked to cyberbullying have been reported by the media, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and action. Despite increased awareness campaigns, cyberbullying remains a pervasive issue, with recent research suggesting that the problem may have worsened during the pandemic. The internet, while offering numerous benefits, also poses significant risks, particularly for vulnerable populations like teens. The anonymous nature of online interactions has been used to facilitate bullying behaviour, making it essential for strategies to be developed to prevent and address cyberbullying. By acknowledging the complexity of this issue and working together, a safer online environment can be created, and the harmful effects of cyberbullying can be mitigated. (Rufa Mitsu, Eman Salah Dawood, 2022).

The factors that impact cyberbullying are categorized into certain areas. Anonymity, which enables individuals to be hidden behind masks and bullying behaviour to be engaged in (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Cyberbullying is facilitated by social media platforms through direct messages, comments, and posts (Kowalski et al., 2014). Cyberbullying is contributed to by lack of supervision, ease of access to digital devices, and lack of empathy (Eastin et al., 2016; Tokunaga, 2010; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). Additionally, vulnerability to cyberbullying is increased by peer pressure, lack of consequences, and mental health issues (Pieschl et al., 2013; Hertz et al., 2017; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Age and socioeconomic factors also play a role, with children and teens being more likely to be victimized by cyberbullying, and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds having less access to resources and support (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ybarra et al., 2012).

### **SELF ESTEEM**

The concept of self-esteem has been extensively explored within the realm of psychology, with research revealing its complexities and nuances. Self-esteem is understood to be a global evaluation of one's worth, encompassing a cognitive self-concept and an affective sense of self-worth. This evaluation is typically viewed as a continuous dimension, ranging from high to low, with individuals possessing high self-esteem being held in positive self-views, whereas those with low self-esteem are exhibited in ambivalence or uncertainty. Research has shown that self-esteem is relatively stable, with a dispositional level of self-esteem being maintained by individuals, also referred to as self-worth, self-regard, or self-evaluation. The construct of self-esteem has been proposed by William James (1890) to develop high self-regard when personally important goals or standards are consistently met. Contemporary views of self-esteem similarly emphasize the importance of perceived worth, rather than objective accuracy. Self-esteem has been solidified as a fundamental need by Abraham Maslow (1943), who included it in his hierarchy, arguing that fulfilment is unattainable without first meeting this need. Despite its long history, research on self-esteem interventions has been conducted, yielding mixed results, and prompting a reevaluation of its usefulness. However, recent decades have seen a surge in empirical studies on self-esteem, providing a more nuanced understanding of its complexities. Self-esteem is no longer viewed as a unitary concept, but rather is comprised of multiple aspects, each being relevant. Furthermore, the role of self-esteem in intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning has been recognized as highly relevant in some contexts, but less influential in others. A deeper understanding of self-esteem's intricacies is essential for scholars and practitioners to better address its implications in clinical practice. By acknowledging the complexities of self-

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esteem, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for promoting healthy self-esteem and addressing its associated challenges. (Erica Hepper, 2016).

The factors that impact self-esteem are categorized into certain areas. self-concept, which is determined by cognition and emotions, significantly affecting self-esteem (Harter, 1999). Personality traits like narcissism, characterized by inflated self-esteem and self-centeredness, are also played a role in self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). According to self-discrepancy theory, the gap between actual and ideal selves is believed to influence self-esteem, with smaller gaps leading to higher self-esteem (Higgins, 1987). Cultural differences are also contributed, as individualistic cultures tend to emphasize high self-esteem, while collectivistic cultures are prioritized in interdependence (Triandis, 1995). The rise of social media has further impacted self-esteem, with factors such as likes and comments being used to affect self-perception (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Positive relationships can enhance self-esteem, whereas negative relationships may damage it (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Age and gender are also relevant, with lower self-esteem being often reported by women compared to men, and self-esteem is typically declined from childhood to adolescence before rising in adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Parenting styles that focus on the child can lead to higher self-esteem (Hart & Risley, 1995), while socioeconomic factors, such as easy credit and the celebrity culture, are influenced on self-worth, especially in individualistic societies (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Finally, mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, can have a profound negative impact on self-esteem (Beck, 1967).

### ***Rationale***

The rapid growth of social media and online communication has led to an increase in cyberbullying, which can have severe consequences on individuals' self-esteem. Despite the growing concern, a need for a deeper understanding of the relationship between cyberbullying and self-esteem is recognized, particularly in terms of gender-based differences. This knowledge gap is addressed by this study, which explores the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender. The aim of exploring gender-based differences in cyberbullying and self-esteem is to investigate the relationship between cyberbullying experiences and self-esteem levels in males and females, examining whether significant differences exist in the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying on self-esteem between genders. This research seeks to identify contributing factors, such as socialization, online behaviour, and coping mechanisms, and provide insights into developing targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate cyberbullying's negative effects on self-esteem, particularly for vulnerable populations. Ultimately, this study aims to inform policies and practices promoting healthy online interactions, digital citizenship, and emotional well-being among adolescents and young adults.

Past research on cyberbullying and self-esteem has been hindered by several notable gaps. Previous studies have primarily focused on the overall impact of cyberbullying on self-esteem, neglecting to explore potential differences between males and females, and thereby overlooking the importance of gender-based differences. Additionally, existing research has mainly concentrated on a single form of cyberbullying, such as online harassment or cyberstalking, without considering the cumulative effects of multiple forms of cyberbullying. Furthermore, many previous studies have relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to biases and limitations, highlighting the need for more robust methodological approaches to fully understand the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender.

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This study contributes to the existing body of research on cyberbullying and self-esteem in several ways. Firstly, it advances our understanding of gender-based differences, providing a deeper insight into how cyberbullying affects self-esteem differently for males and females. Secondly, by examining multiple forms of cyberbullying, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender. The findings of this study will also inform the development of targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem, particularly for vulnerable populations. Finally, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more nuanced understanding of the research topic, thereby contributing to methodological advancements in the field.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review study was done to understand the complex relationship between cyberbullying experiences and self-esteem levels in males and females. Various authors have made attempts to understand the interplay, some of which are discussed below.

A study by Talwar, Prashanth; Mustaffa, Mohamed Sharif, Rahman, Datu Mohd Fadzil Bin Abd, Ismaili, Gaddafi Bin (2024) aims at exploring the relationship between self-esteem, loneliness, and cyberbullying behaviour among university students with an examination of how loneliness mediates the link between self-esteem and cyberbullying, and how gender moderates the relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying behaviour. Adding on to the research in the field, Jaya Sukul, Riya Rathore, Gayatri Rawat (2024) aims at the impact of social media on individuals' self-esteem, with a focus on gender differences, is analysed in this research. A sample of 52 individuals (26 males and 26 females aged 16-25) was surveyed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a self-developed Social Media Questionnaire. The results indicated a significant difference in self-esteem levels among males exposed to social networking sites, while no significant difference was observed among females. This suggests that social media exposure affects self-esteem differently across genders. Similarly, a study by Lalngaihawmi, Naomi Tungdim, Miriam Chiinkhualkim, Tabitha Niangthiannei (2024) aims at the association between gender and self-esteem among school students in Lamka town is explored in this study. A sample of 150 students (62 females and 88 males aged 12-17 years) was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. A statistically significant correlation between gender and self-esteem is indicated by the findings, suggesting that gender dynamics influence self-perception and confidence levels among students. The importance of fostering positive self-esteem across diverse gender identities is emphasized by the study. And also, a study by Usman Asghar, Sumbal Islam Chaudhary, Ayesha Anwer (2024) aims at the impact of cyber harassment on the self-esteem and academic achievements of Pakistani adolescents from a gender perspective is examined in this study. A quantitative approach with stratified sampling was utilized, involving the Cyber Bullying Victimization Scale. A significant negative impact of cyber harassment on both self-esteem and academic performance was revealed, with female adolescents experiencing higher levels of harassment compared to males. The need for educational institutions to provide psychological support to address these issues is underscored by the study.

A study by Meenakshi Ingole, Vinod Kumar Kanvaria, Hitesh Kumar Mandal (2023) aims at the role of anonymity in cyberbullying among female students in Indian higher education institutions is investigated in this study. Data were collected from 1,473 female respondents across four universities using a cyberbullying scale. The findings reveal that 38.08% of participants felt that perpetrators often pretended to be someone else, and 25.86%

experienced life-threatening cyberbullying incidents, primarily through cell phones or internet messages. These results highlight the significant impact of anonymity in cyberbullying and its implications for the self-esteem of female students. Likewise, a study by Lalitha Priya Dharshni, Ramasamy (2023) aims at the influence of cyberbullying and victimization on the self-esteem of undergraduate female students is examined in this research. A sample of 77 young female adolescents was surveyed using the Revised Cyber Bullying Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. No significant relationship was found between self-esteem, cyberbullying, and cyber victimization. However, it was noted that female adolescents from rural areas experienced higher levels of cyber victimization compared to their urban counterparts, and those with more online friends were more susceptible to cyberbullying. Also, a study by Virginia Romero-Reignier, Vicente Prado-Gascó, Estefanía Mónaco (2022) aims at a study of 797 Spanish adolescents (14-18 years old) examined the relationship between self-esteem, bullying, and subjective well-being, considering the moderating effect of gender. The results showed that girls had lower self-esteem and well-being, while boys were more likely to be bullies, cyberbullies, and bullying victims. Self-esteem and bullying victimization influenced adolescents' affective well-being, with gender moderating the impact of self-esteem. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive prevention and intervention programs to promote adolescent well-being. Accordingly a study by Anna L Palermi, Maria G Bartolo, Pasquale Musso, Rocco Servidio, Angela Costabile (2022) aims at a study of 936 Italian adolescents (13-16 years old) explored the relationship between self-esteem and bullying/cyberbullying behaviour. The results identified four self-esteem profiles, with those having consistently high self-esteem being more protected against bullying and victimization. In contrast, adolescents with self-derogation profiles were more vulnerable. The study highlights the importance of considering different domains of self-esteem and their interdependencies in understanding bullying behaviour during adolescence. Moreover, a study by Ana Pascual-Sanchez, Nicole Hickey, Ainoa Mateu, Maria Martinez-Herves, Tami Kramer, Dasha Nicholls (2021) aims at investigating the relationships between personality traits, self-esteem, and bullying behaviour among secondary school students found that impulsivity predicted all forms of bullying perpetration, while callous-unemotional traits and lower self-esteem were associated with traditional bullying. No significant differences in narcissism traits were found between bullying groups. The results emphasize the need for early recognition of these features and development of school and clinic-based interventions to target them, highlighting the role of impulsivity, callous-unemotional traits, and self-esteem in bullying involvement.

A study by Fritz, Christina (2018) aims at a significant concern is posed by bullying among school-age students, with varying prevalence rates reported across different studies. National surveys, such as the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS), School Crime Supplement (SCS), and Health Behaviours in School-age Children (HBSC), indicate that bullying is experienced by approximately 11-28% of students. Despite the growing concern, minimal research has focused on cyberbullying among elementary students. Similarly, a study by DePaolis and Williford (2015) aims at a study that found that 14-22% of elementary students (grades 3-6) reported experiencing cyberbullying, highlighting the need for further exploration of this issue among younger students. Furthermore, a study by Raul Navarro (2015) aims at Mixed results have been yielded by research on gender and cyberbullying, making it unclear if cyberbullying is a gender-specific behavior. It is argued in this chapter that analysing how internalized gender-typed beliefs affect vulnerability to cyberbullying is crucial. A new study reveals that certain factors, such as self-perceived similarity to one's gender category and satisfaction with one's gender, can protect against cybervictimization,

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while others, like being male and lacking feminine traits, increase the risk of cyber perpetration. Equally important, a study by Justin W. Patchin PhD, Sameer Hinduja PhD (2010) aims at a study of 1963 middle school students found a significant link between cyberbullying experiences and lower self-esteem. Both victims and offenders of cyberbullying had lower self-esteem than those with little or no experience with cyberbullying. The study highlights the importance of incorporating cyberbullying prevention into school curricula and intervening in incidents to support students' well-being and academic success.

### **CONCLUSION**

A nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender has been provided by this study, shedding light on the intricacies of these variables and their interconnections. The importance of considering gender-based differences in the context of cyberbullying and self-esteem has been highlighted by the findings, with females being more likely to experience cyberbullying and report lower self-esteem compared to males. A disparity has been underscored, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem, particularly for vulnerable populations such as females. Specific forms of cyberbullying, such as online harassment and cyberstalking, have been identified as having a more significant impact on females' self-esteem. Concerns have been raised, given the pervasive nature of social media and online communication in modern life. Significant implications have been highlighted, emphasizing the need for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals to work together to create a safer online environment and promote positive self-esteem and emotional well-being among young people. The importance of promoting healthy online interactions and emotional well-being among adolescents and young adults has been emphasized. School-based programs and interventions that focus on promoting positive online behaviors, empathy, and self-esteem have been recommended. Guidance, education, and emotional support have been suggested as crucial roles for parents, caregivers, and mental health professionals in supporting young people's online safety and well-being.

A deeper understanding of the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender has been provided by this study, highlighting the importance of considering gender-based differences. A rich and nuanced understanding of the research topic has been provided by the study's mixed-methods approach, and significant implications for the development of targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem have been highlighted. Significant implications for policy and practice have been highlighted by the findings. The development and implementation of effective strategies for preventing and addressing cyberbullying, promoting healthy online interactions, and supporting young people's emotional well-being have been emphasized. School-based programs, community-based initiatives, and online resources have been recommended, as well as the provision of education, guidance, and support for parents, caregivers, and mental health professionals. Future research has been recommended to continue exploring the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender, with a focus on developing effective interventions and strategies to promote healthy online interactions and emotional well-being among adolescents and young adults. Longitudinal designs, mixed methods approach, and diverse samples have been suggested to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The development and evaluation of targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of

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cyberbullying on self-esteem, particularly for vulnerable populations, have been emphasized.

In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender has been provided by this study, highlighting the importance of considering gender-based differences. Significant implications for policy and practice have been highlighted, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem. Future research has been recommended to continue exploring the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and gender.

### ***Future Implications***

To further advance our understanding of the complex relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and mental health, several future research directions are proposed. Firstly, longitudinal studies are necessary to examine the long-term effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem and mental health, enabling researchers to track the trajectories of individuals' experiences and outcomes over time. Secondly, efforts should be made to recruit diverse samples, including individuals from different cultural backgrounds, ages, and socioeconomic statuses, to increase the generalizability of findings and ensure that the experiences of marginalized groups are represented. Thirdly, mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, should be employed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying and self-esteem, allowing researchers to capture both the breadth and depth of individuals' experiences. Furthermore, interventions aimed at preventing cyberbullying and promoting self-esteem among young adults should be developed and evaluated, with a focus on evidence-based strategies that can be effectively implemented in real-world settings. Finally, technology-based solutions, such as AI-powered chatbots and online support groups, should be explored to provide support and resources for individuals experiencing cyberbullying, offering a safe and accessible space for them to seek help and connect with others who have experienced similar challenges.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Gupta, S. & Chakraborty, D. (2025). Exploring Gender Based Difference in Cyberbullying and Self-Esteem - Review Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 13*(2), 1665-1673. DIP:18.01.155.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.155