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Understanding Cyberbullying Among Young Adults Through Various Factors

Umie Ermisha Nazmeer, Nia Camillia Hairil Amri, Nur Suraya Rosli, Muhammad Aiman Zainal Abidin, Muhamad Haridz Hilmi H Tuah Khatib & *Mohd Sufiean Hassan

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka Branch, Malaysia

UMIE ERMISHA NAZMEER

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: 2021487388@uitm.edu.my

NIA CAMILLIA HAIRIL AMRI

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: 2021838174@uitm.edu.my

NUR SURAYA ROSLI

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: 2021867256@uitm.edu.my

MUHAMMAD AIMAN ZAINAL ABIDIN

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: 2021813776@uitm.edu.my

MUHAMAD HARIDZ HILMI H TUAH

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: 2021840262@uitm.edu.my

*MOHD SUFIEAN HASSAN

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch email: mohdsufiean@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

While the internet has transformed the world into a global community, it exposes its users to various perils such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying refers to the deliberate use of digital communication tools, such as social media platforms, instant messaging, and online forums, to harass, intimidate, or harm others. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention due to its potential to inflict psychological harm, particularly on young individuals who are still in the process of forming their identities and self-worth. This study intended to find the contributing factors and effects of cyberbullying towards young adults. We systematically identified 50 relevant literatures from 2019 to 2023 in electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and Sage Journals. The results provide strong evidence that cyberbullying factors affect young adults in terms of mental health, academic performance, behavioural changes, and self-esteem.

Keywords: Mental Health, Academic Performance, Socialisation Agents, Behavioural Changes, Self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

In an era dominated by interconnected technologies and virtual social spaces, the phenomenon of cyberbullying has emerged as a complex and multifaceted challenge, with young adults bearing a disproportionate brunt of its consequences (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Ghineai & Vlasdislav, 2020; Peled, 2019; Tazilah, 2022; Zhu et al., 2019). As the digital landscape continues to reshape communication norms, the experiences of individuals aged 18 to 25 within this realm are becoming increasingly essential to their overall well-being as they are more prone to cyberbullying compared to other generations (Dennehy et al., 2020). Cyberbullying, characterized by the use of electronic platforms to harass, intimidate, or harm others, introduces a new dimension to the age-old issue of interpersonal aggression (McLoughlin et al., 2019).

Our conceptual paper embarks on a crucial exploration of the contributing factors and effects of cyberbullying, with a specific focus on the young adult demographic. It is critical to comprehend the principles of cyberbullying in this age group since it occurs at a crucial point in social integration, academic performance, and self-esteem (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Viner et al., 2019). As said in a study conducted amongst Israeli undergraduate students by Yehuda Peled (2019), 85% of victims suffer from psychological problems which results in depression, social anxiety and hinder their concentration in many things. The rapid adoption of online platforms for socialization, education, and professional networking exposes young adults to unique challenges and vulnerabilities in the digital space (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Viner et al., 2019).

Contributing factors to cyberbullying are diverse and encompass a spectrum of individual, social, and psychological elements (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Ghineai & Vlasdislav, 2020; Peled, 2019; Tazilah, 2022; Zhu et al., 2019). From the influence of socialiazation agents and the role of social relationships to the impact of social dynamics, our examination seeks to dissect the intricate web of factors that foster the proliferation of cyberbullying incidents among young adults. Moreover, the exploration extends beyond identification, delving into the psychological, behavioural, and academic effects that cyberbullying inflicts upon its victims, thereby shaping the lived experiences of young adults in the digital age.

As we navigate through the existing body of literature, it becomes evident that the majority of research has often been confined to specific demographics or geographical locations, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. Consequently, this paper not only aims to synthesize current knowledge but also advocates for a more inclusive and expansive research agenda. By critically examining past studies, we aspire to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced interplay between contributing factors and effects, facilitating the development of targeted interventions, support mechanisms, and informed policies to mitigate the impact of cyberbullying on the well-being of young adults.

In essence, this conceptual paper serves as a foundational exploration, shedding light on the intricacies of cyberbullying within the context of young adulthood. By unpacking the contributing factors and effects, we aim to pave the way for future research endeavours and proactive initiatives aimed at fostering a safer and more inclusive digital environment for this

vulnerable demographic. This detailed introduction provides a broader context, outlines the scope of the research paper, and emphasizes the significance of understanding cyberbullying in the context of young adults.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The profound issue we aim to address revolves around unravelling the detrimental role of different socialization agents as well as the extensive and numerous impacts of cyberbullying on the multifaceted facets of youths' lives, spanning mental health, behavioural changes, self-esteem and academics. This complex problem demands a thorough investigation into not only the existence but also the depth and nature of these factors, serving as the catalyst for our research.

Our primary objective stems from the imperative need to comprehensively understand that the dynamics of cyberbullying are shaped by a myriad of factors, with socialization agents playing pivotal roles. Thus, our research strives to elucidate how different socialization agent - parents, peers, and educational institutions contribute to the manifestation and exacerbation of the detrimental effects of cyberbullying on young individuals.

Inherent within this problem statement is the recognition that cyberbullying significantly influences youths across diverse dimensions. This involves a meticulous exploration of the intricate interplay between cyberbullying and its effects on mental health, academic performance, behavioural changes, and self-esteem among the youth demographic.

This comprehensive approach not only underscores the gravity of the issue at hand but also guides our research objectives, driving us to unravel the intricate relationship between cyberbullying, the significant roles played by the influential forces of parents, peers, and educational institutions as well as its diverse impacts on youths, in order to navigate this intricate and often challenging landscape.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims:

- 1. To investigate the role of different socialization agents in cyberbullying among young adults.
- 2. To study the effects of cyberbullying on mental health among young adults.
- 3. To explore the impact of cyberbullying on the behavioral changes of young adults.
- 4. To study the impact of cyberbullying on young adult's self-esteem.
- 5. To examine the effects of cyberbullying on the academic performance of young adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Different Socialization Agents

The connection between young adults' cyberbullying and socialisation agents has been the subject of numerous research investigations. According to Lippitt (1969), socialisation agents encompass parents, peers, and formal educational institutions, all of which possess the power to shape an individual's values and outlook. These socialisation agents are important in determining an individual's involvement in and response to cyberbullying, whether it is positive or negative (Achuthan et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2020; Guarini et al., 2019; Nagar et al., 2022; Paez, 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

Findings indicate that family factors, such as parental presence and support, significantly impact a youth's resilience to cyberbullying. Similarly, the trust and positive climate established by school educators contribute to a safer environment for disclosure and prevention. Peer dynamics, encompassing deviant affiliations and moral disengagement, further influence cyberbullying perpetration and victimization.

Numerous studies have established a connection between peer, family, and school factors and the impact they can have on young people's engagement in cyberbullying. Trustworthiness, support, and a positive atmosphere have been observed to be associated with a decreased incidence of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying and cybervictimization might result from having a bad association with any of the socialization agents involved. The alarming number of incidents of cyberbullying highlights the need for peers, teachers, and family members to take preventative measures against the growing incidence of cyberbullying among young people.

Effects on Mental Health

There is substantial evidence linking the remarkably excessive rate of cyberbullying among young adults with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Viner et al., 2019; Kwan et al., 2020; Subaramaniam et al., 2022). These mental illnesses were worsened by the continual exposure to threats and the enduring fear of offensive communications, threats, or online harassment. As individuals ruminate on unpleasant memories, this cognitive activity has the potential to worsen stress and anxiety. Furthermore, victims of cyberbullying may feel helpless and unmanageable (Hellfeldt et al., 2020).

Result of the digital world's increasing influence on society increasing the amount of time spent online especially for young adults contributed the factors on the rising case of cyberbullying online (Wang et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2020). Depression is more likely to strike victims of cyberbullying. Their sense of normalcy has been weakened, and emotions of melancholy and pessimism might be exacerbated by the hurtful and unpleasant content that is directed towards them resulting the victim finds it hard to function in daily activities (Zhu et al., 2019; McLoughlin et al., 2019). A major body of researchers suggested that implementing and enforcing comprehensive anti-cyberbullying policies in communicating online can be a major contribution in creating a safe community online.

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Effects on Behavioural Changes

Extensive research has proven that cyberbullying among youths can cause noticeable behavioral changes (Bussu et al., 2023; Mohd Fadhli et al., 2022; Mui et al., 2023). Victims frequently find themselves immersed in heightened feelings of loneliness, suicidal thoughts and ideation and feeling a lack of support (Mui et al., 2023). The digital realm, where connectivity should thrive, becomes a breeding ground for emotional distress.

Due to the lack of support, victims are left grappling with their distress in profound isolation (Macaulay et al., 2022). The absence of a robust support system intensifies the psychological impact, making the experience of cyberbullying even more debilitating. Disturbingly, the research reveals that these distressing encounters can escalate to severe outcomes, plunging victims into the abyss of suicidal thoughts and ideation (Mohd Fadhli et al., 2022; Mui et al., 2023). The urgent call for targeted interventions resonates through the research, emphasizing the critical need to address these interconnected issues effectively. Safeguarding the mental well-being of youths necessitates a comprehensive approach that acknowledges and combats the detrimental effects of cyberbullying on the vulnerable psyche of the younger generation.

Effects on Self-Esteem

The detrimental effects of cyberbullying on young adults' self-esteem have drawn increasing attention in recent research. According to Lei et al. (2019), there is strong evidence regarding the relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying. Research has linked cyberbullying with symptoms of low self-confidence, diminished self-esteem as well as having a negative impact on relationships (Sijil et al., 2019). There was a strong negative correlation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem and a significant positive correlation between appearance anxiety and social anxiety (Xia et al., 2023). This is supported by Aliyev, R., & Gengec, H. (2019) findings that as the resilience level increases, self-esteem level increases.

For another example, studies conducted by Wu et al. (2019) aimed to explore the mechanisms underlying the association between bullying victimization and social anxiety. The results showed that bullying victimization was directly and positively associated with social anxiety. In addition, the positive association between bullying victimization and social anxiety was mediated by shame and self-esteem, respectively.

Effects on Academic Performance

The considerable effect of cyberbullying can also be related towards academic performance especially amongst university students as university is a stepping stone for young adults to learn skills for their line of work in the future. Cyberbullying can play a dangerous role in contributing to the failure of students when it comes to performance due to the amount of stress they face when it comes to facing the problem such as facing absenteeism to avoid school (Yusuf et al., 2021). Cyberbullying can lead to victims having negative impacts on their future due to the stress of it and they tend to isolate themselves from everything. This can cause their academic performance to suffer due to the mental challenges they face (Darawsheh et al., 2023).

Students who fall victim are more likely to fail classes due to the mental strain. Addressing the problem can be useful for them to not be afraid to seek help. Cyberbullying is often caused by the lack of parental guidance based on the research amongst tertiary students in Malaysia (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). Cyberbullying can cause negative results in terms of academic performance due to students facing mental challenges and as well as the long-term effects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We are employing a quantitative research approach for our study. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the contributing factors and effects of cyberbullying among young adults. By delving into the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying experiences, our goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of its impact on the psychological, social, and academic well-being of individuals aged 18-25. Additionally, the study aims to pinpoint and analyse the diverse factors that contribute to the initiation and continuation of cyberbullying incidents within this demographic.

Through this study, we aspire to offer valuable insights that can guide the development of preventive measures and support mechanisms tailored to address the unique challenges faced by young adults in the digital landscape. To gather a comprehensive understanding of the existing scholarly discourse on the effects and contributing factors of cyberbullying towards young adults, an extensive amount of 50 journals were reviewed for our research. Utilizing reputable scholarly literature search engines, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and Sage Journals, a systematic exploration of relevant articles, academic papers, and peer-reviewed journals was undertaken. The inclusion of multiple databases ensures a thorough and diverse coverage of the existing literature on the subject, enhancing the validity and reliability of the information synthesized for this study. Furthermore, the selection of a comprehensive literature review, employing reputable scholarly literature search engines was driven by the need to build upon existing knowledge and insights.

By delving into past research, we aim to gain a nuanced understanding of the effects and contributing factors of cyberbullying towards young adults. This methodological choice is grounded in the belief that a thorough exploration of the literature can provide a robust foundation for our study. Learning from the wealth of past research allows us to contextualize our findings within the broader academic discourse and contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation surrounding cyberbullying in the digital age.

However, our research methodology which consisted of a thorough literature analysis using credible scholarly databases offers a useful synthesis of the body of knowledge regarding the causes and consequences of cyberbullying among young people, it is important to recognise some limitations. The fact that a large percentage of the material that is now accessible may primarily concentrate on particular demographics or geographic areas presents an important limitation. The applicability of our findings to a larger and more varied population may be impacted by this possible bias. We therefore intend to interpret our findings in the context of the demographic and geographic scope that are covered in the literature, taking into factor of this limitation. We also hope to encourage future research projects that cover a wider range of demographics and geographic areas in order to guarantee a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Importance of Different Socialization Agents

Our research has shown that socialisation agents like parents, educators, and peers have a significant impact on young people' engagement with cyberbullying. Guided by the theory of planned behaviour (Achuthan et al., 2022), our findings highlight the nuanced relationship between parental behaviour and cyberbullying outcomes. Overly controlling or absent parental behaviour emerges as a significant factor, correlating with an increased risk of cyberbullying victimization. Overly controlling or absent parental behaviour correlates with an increased risk of cyberbullying victimization, while positive parent-child relationships act as a protective factor, aiding children in navigating the digital realm (Achuthan et al., 2022; Ding et al., 2020; Paez, 2019; Wang et al., 2020).

School educators play a crucial role, with a clear link established between cyberbullying and the overall school environment. Teacher support, cyberbullying severity, and school climate significantly influence adolescents' willingness to disclose incidents. Fostering a positive school climate proves instrumental in preventing cyberbullying, but challenges exist in building trust between students and school officials (Ding et al., 2020; Nagar et al., 2022). However, challenges exist, with some students hesitating to trust school officials due to confidentiality concerns. Building trust becomes a linchpin in addressing cyberbullying effectively (Chan et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2020; Guarini et al., 2019; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Paez, 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

Peer factors wield significant influence in the cyberbullying landscape. Adolescents with higher levels of deviant peer affiliation exhibit an increased likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying (Wang et al., 2019). The concept of cyber-bystander behaviour (Nagar et al, 2022; Wang et al., 2019) underscores varying degrees of involvement among youths who witness cyberbullying. Addressing moral disengagement becomes paramount in effective prevention programs, with peer influence, particularly moral identities, emerging as a significant determinant of a youth's involvement in cyberbullying (Ding et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2020; Nagar et al., 2022; Nagar & Talwar, 2023; Paez, 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

With the main objective being to create a safe environment, positive interactions, and high moral conscience, we have discovered that the role of various socialization agents is highly important and that peers, family, and school educators all play an equally important role in handling cyberbullying among young adults through different aspects of their lives. Positive interactions with socialization agents regarding cyberbullying can have a positive impact on a young person's life, but negative interactions will have the opposite effect (Achuthan et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2020; Guarini et al., 2019; Nagar et al., 2022; Paez, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Figure 1 shows the importance of different socialization agents.

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Figure 1: Importance of Different Socialization Agents

Effects on Mental Health

Based on our research, cyberbullying plays a close relationship with mental health amongst young adults. Victims of cyberbullying are also at a high risk of developing depression. People who are exposed to damaging and bad content may experience depressive, hopeless, and low self-worth feelings (Mui et al., 2023; Mohd Fadhli et al., 2022). The protracted and persistent character of cyberbullying episodes results in a persistent emotional state of distress that has a substantial negative influence on mental health in general (Zhu et al., 2019). Because severe cases might progress to suicidal or self-harming ideas, it's critical to identify depressive symptoms in victims of cyberbullying.

Another common problem in cyberbullying among young adults is that it is closely associated with elevated levels of stress and anxiety. Social media platforms' ongoing accessibility exacerbates the effects, creating a setting in which victims struggle with persistent dread and uncertainty. Because internet platforms are available around-the-clock, cyberbullying lacks time limits, which leads to ongoing stress (Wang et al., 2019). People who are being cyberbullied might ruminate, which makes them feel more anxious since they are thinking back on their bad experiences. The incapacity to defend oneself and the sense of helplessness that accompanies it exacerbate future distress (Wang et al., 2019; McLoughlin et al., 2019).

Cyberbullying has long-lasting effects that affect social interactions and self-esteem well into adulthood. Cyberbullying victims may internalise unfavourable opinions that were created during the occurrence, thereby transforming their confidence and sense of self (Santos et al., 2020). A comprehensive approach involving educators, parents, and mental health specialists is essential to recognising symptoms of victim distress and promptly provide assistance and intervention to lessen long-term effects. As highlighted in research by Viner et al. (2019) and Kwan et al. (2020), mental health professionals, parents, and schools should proactively identify indicators of distress in victims and provide timely support.

In conclusion, cyberbullying has a severe and long-lasting effect on young adults' mental health, increasing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. According to the studies, we have concluded depression is the biggest contributor when it comes to the effects of mental health towards victims with long term effect coming in second and stress and anxiety coming after that. A safer online environment and a reduction in the detrimental effects of cyberbullying on young people's mental health depend on early diagnosis and prompt action. Figure 2 shows the effects of cyberbullying on mental health.



Figure 2: Effects on Mental Health

Effects on Behavioural Changes

Based on our research, we have found significant correlation between cyberbullying and behavioural changes. Cyberbullying can cause negative behavioural changes through feelings of loneliness, having suicidal thoughts and ideation, and also a lack of support.

Research indicates that there is a strong link between loneliness and cyberbullying (Jattamart & Kwangsawad, 2021). Because they are unable to communicate with others normally, victims of persistent online harassment frequently feel socially isolated. The study contends that victims' knowledge of possible danger is increased by loneliness, which has a direct impact. This emotional anguish highlights the negative effects of cyberbullying on people's mental health by contributing to changed behaviour (Tazilah et al., 2022).

The troubling correlation between cyberbullying and suicide ideas has been brought to light by various research (Mui et al., 2023; Mohd Fadhli et al., 2022). Many people have experienced varied degrees of suicide thoughts as a result of persistent cyberbullying (Mui et al., 2023; Mohd Fadhli et al., 2022). Ideation, planning, and attempts are mentioned, which emphasises how serious the psychological cost is. In order to handle this upsetting outcome, the study emphasises the urgent need for intervention and support networks, calling for a comprehensive strategy to address the complex dynamics of cyberbullying.

One of the critical findings underscores the pivotal role of support in mitigating the effects of cyberbullying. The lack of support, both physical and emotional, is identified as a

contributing factor to the persistence of negative behavioural changes in victims (Yoo, 2021). There is an emphasized need for parental involvement and understanding, suggesting that supportive environments can enhance resilience and empower victims to navigate the challenges of both digital and real-world settings (Yoo, 2021).

We can clearly see that cyberbullying amongst young adults can cause negative behavioural changes due to the feelings of loneliness, suicidal thoughts and ideation, and lack of support. Emphasis is put on the lack of support from outsiders as a pivotal role in helping victims deal with cyberbullying as it can help combat feelings of loneliness and suicidal thoughts and ideation. Research highlights the benefits of awareness and the necessity of victim support and preventive actions. A comprehensive strategy that includes awarenessraising, support networks, intervention, and comprehension of the factors influencing a safer online environment is needed to address this problem. Figure 3 shows the effects of cyberbullying on behavioural changes.



Figure 3: Effects on Behavioural Changes

Effects on Self-esteem

Through our research, we can see that cyberbullying negatively effects young adults' selfesteem as seen through low self-confidence, diminished self-esteem, and negative impacts on relationships (Aliyev, R., & Gengec, H., 2019; Arfan et al., 2023; Butt et al., 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Pradhan et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2023). The planned and persistently abusive online behaviours that constitute cyberbullying have been repeatedly linked to the decline in young adult self-esteem. The digital environment, where cyberbullying frequently takes place, makes people more vulnerable and lowers their self-confidence. Victims may internalise the disparaging remarks and assaults, which makes them mistrust their own abilities and reluctant to express themselves honestly.

The major effect that cyberbullying has on people's self-esteem is one of its major side effects. The detrimental impacts on one's sense of self-worth and self-perception are made worse by the persistent nature of online harassment and its capacity to reach a large audience (Pradhan et al., 2022). Constantly being exposed to negative content or social isolation online can have a long-lasting negative emotional impact, leading to feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy (Arfan et al., 2023; Xia et al., 2023).

Cyberbullying casts a shadow on interpersonal relationships by reaching beyond an individual's perspective of themselves. Relationships may suffer as a result of the online hostility since the victims may retreat or have trust concerns (Butt et al., 2019). Relationship pressure can also affect bystanders and those who are aware of the cyberbullying; thus, it effects the victim's perception of themselves (Butt et al., 2019). Understanding how relationships are impacted by cyberbullying emphasises the necessity for all-encompassing tactics to establish a safer online space that encourages respectful relationships and pleasant interactions.

Through this we can clearly see the relationship between cyberbullying through the implications of low self-confidence, diminished self-esteem, and negative impacts on relationships. Our research puts more importance towards young adults' diminished self-esteem as an important factor as this can also negatively affect their self-confidence and outside relationships. Creating successful prevention measures, intervention techniques, and support networks for individuals impacted by cyberbullying requires an understanding of the mechanisms via which the behaviour affects one's sense of self-worth and self-image. Figure 4 shows the effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem.



Figure 4: Effects on Self-esteem

Effects on Academic Performance

Through the studies we have researched, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of cyberbullying creates a significant relationship towards the victims' academic performance. Students, in particular, become vulnerable to the negative consequences of cyberbullying. Academic performance, measured by grades, is critically affected as victims experience stress, lack of concentration, and diminished motivation (Darwashe, 2023). The correlation between cyberbullying and decreased academic achievement is evident in various studies, indicating a potential long-term impact on educational pursuits. The academic performance of

students who are cyberbullied are frequently lower than those who are not (Aparisi et al., 2021; Darwashe, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Research from has shown that stress, anxiety, and sadness are among the mental challenges' students face caused by cyberbullying (Aparisi et al., 2021). Victims may find it difficult to relax, which can cause problems in their personal and academic lives. Students may experience psychological repercussions such as absence, truancy, and even suicide ideation (Yusuf et al., 2021). It becomes essential to address mental challenges in order to break the cycle of lower academic accomplishment that cyberbullying perpetuates.

The long-term consequences of cyberbullying go beyond academic failure and affect victims' opportunities for the future (Yusuf et al., 2021). This is due to the stress and tendency to isolate themselves from everything due to the harassment faced by victims; they will tend to avoid school due to the fear of being embarrassed and unwelcome by their peers (Aparisi et al., 2021). This will ultimately affect their academic journey in the long run due to the negative environment. The result of this effect will have a great impact on their future in life and academics.

In the studies we have researched we can justify that the mental challenges along with the academic performance are the most outstanding result out of the three points on the effect of cyberbullying towards victims regarding academic performance. Long term effects are counted less than the others due to it being able to be overcome with progress. The role of socialization agents is crucial in teaching these students the importance of internet safety and etiquette in order to stop the chain reaction of people who fall victims and become bullies. Netiquette and emotional availability of societal figures has a significant impact towards cyberbullying (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). Figure 5 shows the effects of cyberbullying on academic performance.



Figure 5: Effects on Academic Performance

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to determine the role of different socialization agents and the different consequences of cyberbullying directed at young adults. The findings offer compelling proof that parents, educators, and peers have a significant impact and that cyberbullying has an impact on young adults' mental health, behaviour, self-esteem and academic performance. This study identifies a few variables that contribute to the psychological harm that cyberbullying causes in young adults. Given that cyberbullying causes psychological harm to young adults, particular actions are required to reduce it. Consequently, it is the responsibility of society to uphold moral and constructive speech and language when using social media. The analysis of the literature indicates that cyberbullying has numerous negative effects on mental health that can ruin a person's future. It is critical for different socialization agents to provide support in order to mitigate the effects of cyberbullying and to protect young adults' futures.

***CORRESPONDING AUTHOR**

Dr. Mohd Sufiean Hassan is a Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka Branch. Email: mohdsufiean@uitm.edu.my.

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