CYBERBULLYING IN THE DIGITAL ERA AMONG ADOLESCENTS: A DESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The increasing intensity of adolescent social media use has been followed by a growing risk of cyberbullying, a form of online aggression that can disrupt psychological well-being, social interaction, and academic functioning. This study aimed to examine the forms, contributing factors, impacts, and prevention strategies of cyberbullying among adolescents through a descriptive literature review. The study analyzed 15 national and international scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025. The articles were identified through Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Garuda using the keywords "cyberbullying," "adolescents," and "social media." The selection process applied inclusion criteria related to topic relevance, focus on adolescent populations, publication period, and full-text availability. The selected studies were analyzed through content analysis and thematic synthesis, including data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns. The review shows that the most frequent forms of cyberbullying include online insults, body shaming, impersonation, social exclusion, and the dissemination of embarrassing content. The dominant contributing factors are anonymity, low digital literacy, peer pressure, oversharing behavior, and limited parental supervision. The major impacts include anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, and decreased academic performance. The findings indicate that cyberbullying prevention requires integrated digital literacy education, family supervision, school-based counseling support, and policy-level protection. This literature-based synthesis contributes to a more coherent understanding of cyberbullying among adolescents and highlights the importance of collaborative prevention efforts in the digital era.

Keywords: Adolescents, Cyberbullying, Digital Literacy, Online Safety, Psychological Impact

INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying has become one of the most prominent forms of aggression in the digital era because harmful behavior can now be carried out repeatedly through online platforms with wide reach and rapid dissemination. Pandie and Weismann (2016) explain that cyberbullying involves repeated harmful actions directed at victims through digital media, while Rusyidi Binahayati (2020) emphasizes that this phenomenon has serious psychological, social, and educational consequences for adolescents. Compared with conventional bullying, cyberbullying is more difficult to control because it may occur anonymously, can be shared quickly, and may remain accessible for a long time in digital spaces.

The urgency of studying cyberbullying among adolescents is closely related to the massive growth of internet use in Indonesia. According to APJII (2025), internet penetration in Indonesia reached 80.66% in 2025, with the highest usage concentrated among younger generations, including adolescents and Gen Z users. This high level of connectivity expands adolescents' opportunities to communicate, learn, and participate socially, but it also exposes them to risks such as harassment, humiliation, exclusion, and the spread of harmful content on social media. In this context, cyberbullying is not merely a technological issue; it is also an educational, psychological, and social problem.

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by emotional fluctuation, identity exploration, sensitivity to peer responses, and a strong desire for social recognition. These characteristics make adolescents highly vulnerable to online interactions that are hostile or

humiliating. Studies discussed in the reviewed literature indicate that online behavior among adolescents is often influenced by peer pressure, emotional impulsivity, the search for validation, and patterns of oversharing in digital environments (Siti et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). Limited digital literacy and insufficient parental supervision may further intensify this vulnerability, making adolescents both potential victims and potential perpetrators of cyberbullying.

Although previous studies have discussed cyberbullying from different angles, many focus only on one aspect, such as prevalence, psychological effects, or legal implications. A clearer integrative review is needed to synthesize four central dimensions simultaneously: the forms of cyberbullying, the factors that contribute to it, its impacts on adolescents, and the prevention strategies proposed in the literature. Such a synthesis is important because fragmented discussion may limit the practical usefulness of research for schools, families, counselors, and policymakers.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a descriptive literature review of cyberbullying among adolescents in the digital era. Specifically, the review synthesizes evidence from selected national and international studies to explain the dominant forms of cyberbullying, the main causal or contributing factors, the psychological and academic impacts experienced by adolescents, and the strategies that can be implemented to prevent and respond to cyberbullying more effectively.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive literature review design. The purpose of this approach was to synthesize published scientific evidence on cyberbullying among adolescents rather than to collect primary data from participants or local communities. Accordingly, this revised manuscript is positioned explicitly as a literature-based study and does not rely on interviews, observations, or other field-based empirical procedures.

The review used 15 national and international scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025. Literature was searched through Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Garuda using the keywords “cyberbullying,” “adolescents,” and “social media.” These databases were selected to capture both international and Indonesian publications relevant to the topic.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) the article discussed cyberbullying as a central topic; (2) the study focused on adolescents or youth populations; (3) the publication fell within the 2015–2025 period; (4) the full text was accessible; and (5) the article contained findings relevant to at least one of the following themes: forms of cyberbullying, contributing factors, impacts, or prevention strategies. Articles were excluded if they were duplicates, did not focus on adolescents, addressed online behavior without discussing cyberbullying directly, or lacked sufficient information for analysis.

The article-selection process consisted of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility checking, and final inclusion. During identification, potentially relevant articles were collected from the selected databases. During screening, titles and abstracts were examined to remove clearly irrelevant studies. During eligibility checking, full texts were reviewed to ensure

methodological and thematic relevance. The final stage resulted in 15 articles that met the review criteria.

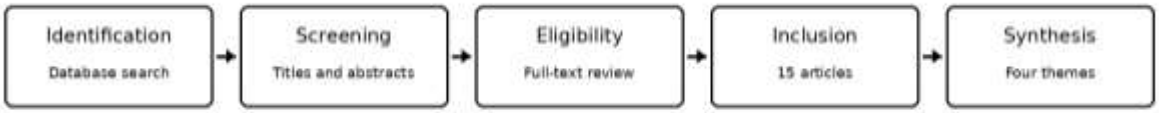


Figure 1. Literature Identification, Screening, Selection, and Thematic Synthesis

Data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic synthesis. First, relevant information was reduced and extracted from each article. Second, findings were coded and grouped into recurring categories. Third, these categories were synthesized into four major themes: forms of cyberbullying, contributing factors, impacts on adolescents, and prevention strategies. Because the data source consisted exclusively of published literature, the findings in this study should be understood as a synthesis of previous research rather than as direct empirical evidence from a specific local setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms Of Cyberbullying Identified In The Reviewed Literature

The reviewed studies show that cyberbullying appears in several recurring forms across social media and messaging platforms. The most frequently reported forms include online insults, ridicule, body shaming, intimidation through direct messages or comment sections, impersonation, the spread of embarrassing photos or private information, and social exclusion from online groups. These findings indicate that cyberbullying is not limited to one platform or one communication mode; instead, it evolves with the features available on digital media, including public comments, reposting, anonymous accounts, and group chats. Such forms of abuse are particularly harmful because they combine repetition, publicity, and the persistence of digital traces.

The literature also suggests that cyberbullying differs from face-to-face bullying in its speed and audience reach. Harmful content can circulate widely within a short period, increasing the victim's exposure to shame and emotional distress. In adolescent environments, where peer evaluation is highly significant, humiliating posts, screenshots, or repeated negative comments may intensify victimization beyond the initial act itself (Pandie & Weismann, 2016; Putri et al., 2024).

Contributing Factors To Cyberbullying Among Adolescents

The synthesis of the reviewed articles indicates that cyberbullying is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and technological factors. One major factor is anonymity, which reduces accountability and allows perpetrators to act aggressively without direct confrontation. Another factor is low digital literacy, including limited understanding of online ethics, privacy, consequences of digital traces, and responsible communication. Adolescents who are not sufficiently equipped with ethical digital competencies may underestimate the seriousness of hostile online behavior.

In addition, peer pressure and the search for social validation play an important role. Adolescents often seek approval, popularity, and recognition in online spaces, and this may encourage provocative behavior intended to attract attention. Oversharing and dependence on online responses can also create situations in which adolescents become more vulnerable to ridicule, rejection, or retaliatory aggression (Siti et al., 2024). The reviewed studies further show that limited parental supervision and weak school monitoring may reduce preventive control, thereby increasing opportunities for cyberbullying to occur (Rusyidi Binahayati, 2020; Rusliawan et al., 2024).

Psychological, Social, And Academic Impacts

The literature consistently demonstrates that cyberbullying has serious consequences for adolescents' mental health. Victims commonly experience anxiety, stress, fear, shame, reduced self-confidence, depressive symptoms, and social withdrawal. Bottino et al. (2015) identify cyberbullying as a risk factor associated with psychological distress and broader mental health problems among adolescents. Likewise, the studies synthesized in this review indicate that cyberbullying may disturb emotional stability and reduce adolescents' sense of safety in both online and offline environments.

The effects of cyberbullying extend beyond psychological distress. Socially, victims may withdraw from peers, avoid participation in group activities, and feel isolated from their school or friendship networks. Academically, emotional disturbance may reduce concentration, motivation, attendance, and classroom engagement. Some studies also note physical complaints related to prolonged stress, such as headaches or somatic discomfort. Therefore, cyberbullying should be understood as a multidimensional problem that affects adolescent well-being, relationships, and educational performance simultaneously (Putri et al., 2024; Rusliawan et al., 2024).

Prevention Strategies And Educational Implications

The reviewed literature emphasizes that cyberbullying prevention cannot rely on a single actor or a single strategy. Effective prevention requires collaboration among families, schools, counselors, communities, and policymakers. At the family level, parental supervision and open communication are important to help adolescents use social media responsibly. At the school level, digital citizenship education, anti-bullying campaigns, reporting mechanisms, and counseling services are necessary to build ethical awareness and provide support for students who experience online victimization.

Counseling and guidance services have a particularly important role because they can strengthen coping skills, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and digital decision-making among adolescents. In addition, social media itself may be used positively as a platform for campaigns, peer education, and the dissemination of constructive values. From a policy perspective, legal frameworks such as the Indonesian Law on Information and Electronic Transactions provide a basis for regulating harmful online conduct, although educational and preventive approaches remain essential for long-term impact (Republic of Indonesia, 2008). Overall, the literature

suggests that cyberbullying prevention should integrate digital literacy, ethical awareness, emotional support, and consistent institutional response.

Analytical Synthesis

Taken together, the reviewed studies portray cyberbullying as a complex phenomenon rooted in the interaction between adolescent developmental characteristics and the affordances of digital technology. The speed, visibility, and persistence of online communication amplify the consequences of aggressive behavior and make recovery more difficult for victims. This review also shows that cyberbullying cannot be addressed only as misbehavior by individuals; it must be understood within broader educational, familial, social, and technological ecosystems.

The main contribution of this revised manuscript is to present a coherent synthesis that aligns the evidence base with the stated research design. By focusing exclusively on literature-derived findings, this paper clarifies that its conclusions are based on previously published research rather than on undeclared fieldwork. This alignment strengthens the credibility of the analysis and makes the recommendations more consistent with the method used.

CONCLUSION

This descriptive literature review shows that cyberbullying among adolescents in the digital era appears in multiple forms, including insults, humiliation, impersonation, social exclusion, and the spread of embarrassing content through social media and digital messaging platforms. The reviewed studies indicate that the phenomenon is shaped by anonymity, low digital literacy, peer influence, oversharing behavior, and limited parental supervision. Its consequences are substantial, ranging from anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem to social withdrawal and decreased academic performance. The review also confirms that prevention requires a collaborative and sustained response involving families, schools, counselors, communities, and policymakers. Digital literacy education, ethical guidance, psychological support, and accessible reporting systems are central to reducing cyberbullying and promoting healthier online interaction among adolescents. Because this study is based exclusively on 15 published articles, its findings should be interpreted as a synthesis of existing literature rather than as direct empirical evidence from a particular local setting. Future studies may strengthen this topic by combining literature reviews with field-based data, comparative designs, or intervention studies that evaluate the effectiveness of school- and family-based prevention programs.

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