

CYBERBULLYING & CHALLENGES OF ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Abstract. *Cyberbullying on social media is a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread among adolescents in tandem with the rapid development of digital technology. These aggressive and repeated (persistent) actions carried out via digital technology not only impact mental health in general but also specifically affect adolescents' self-confidence, a fundamental aspect of identity development. This article aims to analyze the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents' self-esteem based on a synthesis of various previous studies. The method used is a literature review with a qualitative descriptive approach, analyzing other relevant scientific articles. The findings of this study indicate that cyberbullying has a significant negative impact on adolescents' self-confidence through mechanisms of negative affect (feelings of shame, pessimism, and anxiety), behavioral changes (withdrawal from social environments), and cognitive distortions (decreased self-esteem and self-belief). Many adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying tend to feel worthless, doubt their abilities, and lose confidence in their ability to interact healthily within their social environment. The results of this study reveal that cyberbullying on social media has a significant negative influence on adolescents' self-confidence. This study recommends the need for interventions aimed at building self-confidence as a strategy to mitigate the effects of cyberbullying on adolescents.*

Keywords Adolescent;; Cyberbullying; New Media; Psychological Well-Being

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought fundamental changes to adolescents' patterns of social interaction. Data from the Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia APJII (2021-2022) show that adolescents aged 13–18 years constitute the largest group of internet users in Indonesia, reaching 99.16% during the 2021–2022 period. Social media, which was initially designed as a medium for communication and self-expression, has now evolved into a new arena for violent behavior known as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is defined as aggressive and intentional behavior carried out repeatedly by individuals or groups through electronic media against victims who are unable to defend themselves effectively. This phenomenon has distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from conventional bullying, including perpetrators' anonymity, the rapid and uncontrollable spread of information, and the absence of direct face-to-face interaction, which consequently reduces perpetrators' sense of empathy.

Self-confidence is a fundamental aspect of adolescents' psychological development during the transition to adulthood. According to Erik Erikson, adolescents are in the stage of identity versus role confusion, in which the formation of a healthy identity is highly dependent on

positive feedback from their social environment. However, cyberbullying occurring in digital public spaces instead creates systematic attacks on adolescents' self-image through insults, ridicule, negative rumors, and public humiliation.

Data indicate that Indonesia ranks second in Southeast Asia in cyberbullying cases, with 49% of adolescents reporting that they have experienced online bullying. The Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) reported that cyberbullying cases in 2021 reached 1,283 cases, and this number continues to increase. A UNICEF(2019) survey involving 170,000 adolescents across 27 countries recorded that 56,667 adolescents admitted to experiencing cyberbullying. More concerning, only 3.6% of victims reported these incidents to the authorities.

Previous studies have demonstrated a relationship between self-concept and cyberbullying. Samha et al. found a correlation between self-concept and cyberbullying among adolescents. Tumonglo et al (2025) emphasized that self-regulation—the ability to manage emotions, impulses, and behavior—plays a crucial role as a psychological protective factor. Anjani(2024) complemented this perspective through Online Disinhibition Effect theory proposed by John Suler, which explains that anonymity, invisibility, and asynchronicity in digital spaces can trigger perpetrators' aggressiveness while simultaneously strengthening victims' feelings of helplessness.

The gap identified in previous studies is that the impact of cyberbullying on self-confidence is often discussed only as part of broader psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety, without an in-depth explanation of how cyberbullying mechanisms specifically undermine adolescents' self-confidence. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a literature synthesis focused on the influence of cyberbullying on adolescents' self-confidence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to all forms of violence experienced by children or adolescents and perpetrated by peers of the same age through cyberspace or the internet. Cyberbullying occurs when a child or adolescent is mocked, insulted, intimidated, or humiliated by another child or adolescent through internet-based media.

2.2 Challenges of Adolescent Psychological Well-Being

The main challenge arises from the discrepancy in brain maturity. The limbic system, which regulates emotions, develops more rapidly than the prefrontal cortex, which functions as the center of executive control and logical reasoning. This biological imbalance causes adolescents to be more vulnerable to impulsive behavior, risk-taking, and emotional instability, which, if not managed properly, can gradually undermine their psychological well-being. In the contemporary era, social media acts as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it offers connectivity; on the other hand, it creates artificial standards of beauty and success. The emergence of extreme social comparison phenomena triggers low self-esteem and body image disorders. Furthermore, competitive academic pressure amid global uncertainty increases cognitive burdens, leading to chronic stress and depression.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a literature review methodology to synthesize existing data and elaborate on previous findings, thereby providing a clear, structured framework for addressing the research problem (Andriani, 2021). The data utilized in this research consist entirely of secondary sources gathered from relevant and credible academic literature, including journal articles, books, and other scholarly publications. These sources were meticulously selected based on their alignment with the research theme, credibility, and overall contribution to the discussion.

The data collection process was conducted through a targeted search on Google Scholar using specific keywords related to the research topic. The retrieved literature was then screened based on predetermined criteria, including thematic relevance, publication year, and source quality. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach, which involved critically reviewing, comparing, and synthesizing the selected literature. The insights gained from this process were then interpreted to draw systematic and structured conclusions that directly address the core research questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Forms of Cyberbullying that Affect Adolescents' Self-Confidence

Based on the synthesis of various journals, the forms of cyberbullying that most significantly affect adolescents' self-confidence include several categories. First, flaming refers to sending messages containing harsh, vulgar, or threatening words that make victims feel humiliated and destroy their dignity in public. Second, harassment refers to repeated disturbing messages that create continuous feelings of insecurity and gradually erode self-confidence. Third, denigration involves spreading rumors or false information to damage someone's reputation, directly destroying self-image and the belief that one is valued by others. Fourth, impersonation refers to pretending to be someone else through fake accounts, causing victims to lose control over their self-representation and experience identity confusion. Fifth, outing and trickery involve spreading private or confidential information without permission, destroying victims' sense of safety and trust that they deserve protection. Sixth, cyberstalking refers to continuous online stalking that creates psychological terror, helplessness, and the collapse of self-confidence. Seventh, exclusion refers to intentionally excluding someone from online groups, reinforcing feelings of rejection, worthlessness, and social isolation.

4.2 The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescents' Self-Confidence

Based on a comprehensive analysis of various journals, the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents' self-confidence can be classified into three interrelated domains:

a. Affective (Emotional) Impact on Self-Confidence

Research conducted by Luthfiyanti and Savira (2023) through in-depth interviews with four participants revealed various negative emotional effects that directly erode self-confidence. Victims experience shame that makes them reluctant to post anything on social media for an indefinite period. They also feel insecure, leading to hesitation in expressing themselves both online and offline. In addition, victims experience overthinking, characterized by excessive thoughts about how others perceive them. Victims also become pessimistic, losing confidence that they possess positive value. Furthermore, they experience excessive anxiety in the form of pathological worries regarding negative judgments from others.

One participant in the study admitted trembling from shock and anger after receiving hateful comments from a fake account, indicating a profound disturbance in self-belief. Another participant even changed their phone number to avoid online terror, reflecting the collapse of safety and self-confidence in social interaction.

b. Behavioral Impact as a Reflection of Decreased Self-Confidence

The decline in self-confidence due to cyberbullying manifests in significant behavioral changes. Victims tend to isolate themselves in their rooms as an avoidance mechanism, reflecting the loss of courage to face the social world. Victims also experience eating and sleeping disorders, such as loss of appetite and insomnia, as psychosomatic responses to prolonged stress caused by attacks on self-image. Furthermore, social withdrawal occurs when adolescents choose isolation over facing potential negative judgment, thereby reinforcing the

spiral of declining self-confidence. Social isolation causes victims to feel alienated and lonely, worsening negative beliefs about themselves.

c. Cognitive Impact on Self-Belief

Cyberbullying systematically damages the cognitive structure underlying self-confidence. There is a decline in learning motivation due to the loss of confidence in personal abilities. Participants in the study by Luthfiyanti and Savira (2023) experienced decreased academic performance as a result. Victims also suffer from loss of concentration because they are unable to focus on academic tasks while constantly disturbed by cyberbullying experiences. In addition, distorted self-evaluation occurs when victims internalize negative comments as truths about themselves, forming deeply rooted negative cognitive schemas. Finally, decreased self-esteem emerges both as a direct consequence and as a factor that increases vulnerability to the effects of cyberbullying.

4.3 The Impact of Cyberbullying on Self-Worth, Self-Esteem, and Self-Care

Based on the research conducted by Elyas et al. (2021), healthy self-confidence consists of three pillars: self-worth, self-esteem, and self-care. Cyberbullying damages all three simultaneously.

a. Impact on Self-Worth

Self-worth refers to a person's belief that they are valuable regardless of achievements, rewards, or personal qualities. Cyberbullying destroys self-worth through several mechanisms. First, victims internalize negative comments and begin questioning whether they truly deserve respect. Second, feelings of worthlessness emerge due to negative peer evaluations or social exclusion. Third, denial and self-blame occur when victims begin searching for faults within themselves.

b. Impact on Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to feeling secure and comfortable with who one truly is, where one belongs, and what one possesses. The impact of cyberbullying on self-esteem includes a drastic decline in self-worth, making victims feel unworthy, unaccepted, and insignificant. Furthermore, victims lose self-confidence, causing them to withdraw from social interactions. In extreme cases, suicide attempts may occur as the culmination of self-esteem collapse, when victims feel that life no longer has meaning.

c. Impact on Self-Care

Self-care refers to actions taken to maintain physical and psychological health. Cyberbullying damages self-care through physical disturbances such as sleep disorders, loss of appetite, headaches, and digestive problems. Additionally, victims withdraw from enjoyable activities and lose interest in hobbies and activities that previously brought happiness. Social isolation also occurs, as victims avoid social interactions due to fear of becoming targets again.

4.4 Differences Between Immediate Effects and Long-Term Impacts

Based on the study conducted by Hidayat and Putra (2025), it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the immediate effects and long-term impacts of cyberbullying on adolescents' self-confidence.

Immediate effects are temporary, immediately felt, and potentially recoverable with rapid social support. These effects include excessive shame, hesitation in decision-making, difficulty accepting compliments, social withdrawal, fear of public speaking, constant self-comparison, hiding one's identity on social media, and feelings of worthlessness.

Long-term impacts are more persistent, difficult to recover from without professional intervention, and capable of affecting all aspects of victims' lives. These include social anxiety disorders, chronic depression, persistent inferiority, significant academic decline, body image disorders, self-harming behavior, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and victims eventually becoming perpetrators of cyberbullying themselves.

Research by Hidayat and Putra (2025) showed that among 149 respondents at SMA Dharma Bakti Palembang, 3.4% of adolescents had poor mental health, and all adolescents experiencing high levels of cyberbullying (1.3%) were categorized as having poor mental health, with a p-value of 0.000.

4.5 Factors Moderating the Influence of Cyberbullying on Self-Confidence

Factors moderating the influence of cyberbullying on adolescents' self-confidence can be divided into internal and external factors.

a. Internal Factors

Victims' personality traits play an important role. Adolescents with neurotic or introverted personality traits tend to be more vulnerable to severe declines in self-confidence. Emotional intelligence also influences outcomes, as poor emotional regulation correlates with more severe impacts on self-confidence.

Initial self-esteem is another determining factor. Adolescents with low self-esteem before experiencing cyberbullying are at greater risk of experiencing extreme collapse in self-confidence. Initial self-concept is also important; negative self-concepts intensify the impact, while positive self-concepts function as protective buffers. Self-regulation plays a crucial role because adolescents with weak self-regulation are unable to manage negative emotions effectively, leading to rapid deterioration of self-confidence.

Gender also becomes a factor, with females being more vulnerable as victims, while males tend not to report incidents due to masculinity pressures.

b. External Factors

Parental support is highly important. Adolescents who receive support at home report feelings of relief, whereas lack of support worsens the decline in self-confidence. Peer support also plays a crucial role in restoring victims' self-confidence. A positive school environment can function as a protective buffer against the negative effects of cyberbullying.

Insufficient parental supervision of social media usage increases adolescents' vulnerability. Positive and supportive peer environments serve as protective factors, while aggressive environments encourage adolescents to become perpetrators themselves. Harmonious family conditions also function as protective factors, whereas broken-home family situations increase adolescents' vulnerability to mental health problems.

3.6 Legal Aspects of Cyberbullying

Indonesia has enacted Law Number 19 of 2016, an amendment to Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE). Article 27 paragraph (3) regulates insults and defamation through electronic media, while Article 29 regulates threats and intimidation.

However, these regulations possess several significant weaknesses. First, the law does not explicitly mention "cyberbullying" as a specific offense. Second, the process of proving cases is complicated because anonymous perpetrators are difficult to identify. Third, cross-jurisdictional issues arise because perpetrators and victims may reside in different legal regions. Fourth, reporting rates remain extremely low, with only 3.6% of victims reporting incidents due to fear of victim blaming or complicated legal procedures. Fifth, weak law enforcement causes perpetrators to feel free from consequences while victims feel unprotected by the state.

The inability of the legal system to provide justice reinforces victims' feelings of helplessness and worthlessness. Self-confidence is damaged not only by perpetrators' attacks but also by the inability of the surrounding environment, including authorities, to provide protection.

G. Novelty: Strengthening the Argument that Self-Confidence is the Primary Target of Cyberbullying

Based on the synthesis of literature from various journals, this study proposes a new argument that self-confidence is not merely a side effect of cyberbullying, but rather the primary target systematically attacked and destroyed.

a. Cyberbullying Directly Targets Self-Image

Cyberbullying on social media possesses unique characteristics because humiliation occurs publicly within digital spaces. Unlike conventional bullying, which may occur privately, cyberbullying exposes victims to wide audiences. Victims receive negative comments on personal photo posts, directly attacking the self-image they wish to present publicly. Public attacks create deeper "social wounds" because victims feel that many people simultaneously judge their self-image negatively.

b. Perpetrator Anonymity Creates Helplessness that Destroys Self-Confidence

Cyberbullying perpetrators often use anonymous or fake accounts, while victims cannot defend themselves effectively. Only 40–50% of victims know the perpetrators' identities. This condition systematically creates feelings of helplessness.

Some perpetrators engage in cyberbullying because they were previously victims themselves and seek revenge to regain a sense of control and self-worth. When victims cannot identify or respond proportionally to threats, their belief in controlling their social environment (internal locus of control) collapses. The destruction of this internal locus of control forms the foundation for the collapse of self-confidence.

c. Repetition Creates Negative Internalization

One criterion of cyberbullying is repetition. Continuous attacks on self-image create habituation effects in which victims begin accepting negative comments as objective truths about themselves. This internalization process becomes a key mechanism through which healthy self-confidence transforms into pathological self-doubt.

d. Contribution to Suicidal Thoughts as an Extreme Consequence

Cyberbullying can generate severe psychological pressure that, in some cases, leads to suicidal thoughts or attempts. This phenomenon demonstrates that when self-confidence completely collapses, victims lose the fundamental belief that their lives possess value. This serves as the most extreme evidence that self-confidence is the primary target of cyberbullying.

e. Reciprocal Relationship Between Low Self-Confidence and Cyberbullying

For victims, a vicious cycle develops: the more they are bullied, the lower their self-confidence becomes; the lower their self-confidence, the more difficult it becomes to resist, making them easier targets. For perpetrators, hidden low self-confidence behind aggressive behavior motivates them to engage in cyberbullying as a form of social compensation.

The implication of these findings is that interventions aimed at improving self-confidence should be directed not only toward victims but also toward perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review of various major journals and the synthesis of supporting studies, it can be concluded that cyberbullying on social media has serious negative effects on

adolescents' self-confidence. These effects are visible not only emotionally, such as feelings of shame, anxiety, insecurity, and overthinking, but also behaviorally, causing victims to become more withdrawn, isolate themselves socially, and lose motivation to study and participate in daily activities. Furthermore, cyberbullying damages self-love and self-appreciation, including the loss of self-worth, low self-esteem, and reduced ability to care for oneself properly.

Self-confidence becomes the primary target of cyberbullying because attacks occur openly on social media, are often anonymous, and happen repeatedly. These conditions make victims more likely to believe the negative comments they receive, gradually influencing how they perceive themselves. In severe cases, psychological pressure resulting from cyberbullying may even lead to suicidal thoughts.

The effects of cyberbullying may be temporary or long-term. If victims receive social support and proper intervention, their psychological condition can still recover. However, if left untreated, the effects may persist and influence various aspects of victims' lives, including social relationships, mental health, and future prospects. On the other hand, legal protection against cyberbullying in Indonesia still contains many weaknesses, causing victims to feel that they do not receive adequate justice and protection.

Therefore, addressing cyberbullying should not focus solely on stopping bullying behavior, but also on restoring victims' self-confidence. Cooperation among families, schools, communities, and governments is necessary through education, psychological assistance, open communication, and more effective law enforcement so that cyberbullying among adolescents can be prevented and addressed more effectively.

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