

BEWARE OF CYBERBULLYING! AS A TRIGGER FOR DEPRESSION IN STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research examines cyberbullying among adolescents, especially students, exacerbated by rapid technological advancements and the dominance of social media. In Indonesia, nearly half of adolescents have become victims, experiencing serious impacts such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, as exemplified by the case of Lara da Silva. This research employed a qualitative method with a literature review approach to analyze data from relevant publications (2020-2025), aiming to provide an in-depth understanding and establish a basis for effective intervention. Findings indicate that cyberbullying is a complex issue driven by individual factors (e.g., lack of digital literacy), social factors (peer pressure), and technological factors (weak online privacy, and easy access to social media), further aggravated by online anonymity. "Flaming" is identified as a common form of expression. The psychological impact is severe, leading to depression and suicidal risk; depression often serves as the main link between online harassment and suicidal thoughts in isolated adolescents. Therefore, guidance and counseling services are crucial. Group guidance with socio-drama techniques is effective in fostering empathy, while group counseling with reframing techniques helps change negative thought patterns. The combination of these approaches is vital for character development and providing essential support to cyberbullying victims.

Keywords: Adolescents; Cyberbullying; Depression; Students

1. Introduction

The development of technology is progressing rapidly and affecting almost all aspects of human life in today's digital era. Technology not only facilitates various human activities but also continues to advance as a result of innovation and human needs themselves. Thus, a close reciprocal relationship occurs between humans and technology, making them interdependent and difficult to separate. It is undeniable that technology has both positive and negative impacts, depending on how it is used (Tamimi & Munawaroh, 2024).

One of the most commonly used forms of technology is social media. Social media is not only used by adults but is also very popular among teenagers or high school students. In Indonesia, the use of social media is very significant. According to a report from DataReportal in January 2025, approximately 143 million inhabitants of Indonesia are active social media users, which means about 50.2% of the population. This number indicates that social media has become an important part of daily life, especially for teenagers who are the most active users. A 2024 Talker Research survey showed that out of 2,000 teenagers surveyed, on average, they spend around 6.6 hours per day using social media, and as many as



11% of them use social media for more than 15 hours every day (Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF), 2025).

The high intensity of social media use among teenagers can have various consequences, both positive and negative. Teenagers themselves are in a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, known as the period of identity search. According to (Hurlock, 1989), adolescence lasts from about 13 to 18 years old (the age of middle school students) and is a challenging time. Many teenagers struggle to solve problems because, as children, they are used to being helped by parents or teachers in resolving various issues. As they enter adolescence, they start to want independence and tend to reject help from adults, even though they do not yet have enough experience to solve problems on their own. This is what makes teenagers vulnerable to mental pressure when facing problems, including issues that arise from interactions on social media.

One of the serious problems often experienced by teenagers in the use of social media is cyberbullying or bullying in the digital space. Cyberbullying refers to deliberate aggressive behavior intended to belittle or hurt others through various digital media, such as mobile phones, social media, instant messaging, email, and online gaming platforms. The impact of cyberbullying should not be taken lightly. Many victims of cyberbullying often experience anxiety, depression, stress, social isolation, and in some cases may have thoughts of suicide (Dewi et al., 2023).

The facts on the ground reinforce this, based on UNICEF data from 2020, out of 2,777 Indonesian adolescents aged 14 to 24 (high school students), about 45% reported having experienced cyberbullying. This figure indicates that almost half of the surveyed teenagers have been victims. Interestingly, teenage boys experienced digital bullying slightly more than girls, with 49% compared to 41%. The most common types of cyberbullying according to 1,207 respondents in U-Report are harassment through chat applications (45%), sharing personal photos/videos without consent (41%), and other types of harassment (14%).

According to UNICEF findings, it can be concluded that cyberbullying is a serious phenomenon experienced by almost half of Indonesian teenagers aged 14 to 24. This data underscores the importance of digital literacy and the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies to protect teenagers from the negative impacts of bullying in the online world.

One form of cyberbullying that often occurs, especially among teenagers, is 'flaming' or the act of sending messages that are harsh, provocative, or vulgar directed at a specific individual through online groups, email, or other text messages. This behavior is particularly prevalent among adolescents. This is evidenced by findings from (L. H. Putri & Savira, 2023), which indicate that flaming cyberbullying incidents are most common at SMAN 3 Rantau Utara in the 11th grade, where harsh messages are repeatedly sent via SMS/messenger/social networks due to being hurt by someone. Then, (Purnomo & Fasya, 2022) found that various forms of materials such as writing, stickers, and images are the most commonly used media for performing cyberbullying. Furthermore, those photos or images are modified into what is known as "memes"; these memes are uploaded to social media and provoke reactions from other teenagers in the form of negative comments that are sarcastic or abusive. Bullying also occurs abroad, causing the victim to experience significant psychological impacts; one of the cases reported by (BBC News Indonesia, 2021) is as follows: In 2015, Lara da Silva, then 12 years old, became a victim of cyberbullying after a video of her physical fight with her friend, Jessica, after school in a small town

in Brazil went viral. A video clip showing Lara asking Jessica, "Are you done, Jessica?" went viral and was turned into a "meme." As a result, Lara constantly heard comments and mockery, especially at school. Her mother tried to protect her by limiting her access to television and the internet, even prohibiting her from going outside. However, this was not enough, and Lara eventually chose to drop out of school because she felt constantly judged and recognized by many people due to the video. The impact of this cyberbullying was severe for Lara, leading her to depression and self-harm. She eventually underwent psychological treatment and was diagnosed with depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and anxiety disorder. Lara's story was revealed in an interview with BBC News Brasil in 2021.

Cyberbullying that occurs continuously will certainly disturb the mental health of the victims, and it can even lead to depression. The impact of cyberbullying does not stop at the stage of depression but can continue to extreme actions such as suicide. Evil comments and messages spread on social media make teenagers live in terror and depression, which ultimately can drive them to end their own lives (Handayani, 2020). According to Wright (1993), depression is a cluster of systems under which we find everything from feeling a little down to being helpless (Haksasi & Dewi, 2020). Furthermore, Wright (1989) states that suicide is a deliberate act to destroy oneself and the uncertain chance of living.

Based on the explanation and the cases above, this article aims to examine and describe how adolescents, especially high school students, are very vulnerable to cyberbullying, both as perpetrators and as victims. This writing also aims to determine the extent to which social media influences bullying behavior in cyberspace and its impact on students' mental health, leading victims to experience depression and increasing the risk of suicide. Additionally, this article also explains the implications of counseling services that can be a preventive and intervention effort against cyberbullying behavior.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature review approach, which is a written summary of scientific journal articles, books, and other documents that describe the results of previous research and current developments related to the research study that will/is being conducted, with the aim of presenting research findings, linking a research study, and providing a theoretical framework to organize a research study (Riasnugrahani & Analya, n.d.).

The preparation of this literature review is done through several steps, such as determining key terms that align with the theory in the research, searching for literature relevant to the research, evaluating the quality of sources from references and selecting appropriate literature, summarizing the literature, and writing the literature review (Riasnugrahani & Analya, n.d.).

Data was collected from various written sources such as books, articles, journals, and other publications both national and international, for articles and journals published in the last five years, between 2020 and 2025, that are relevant to the research topic. The collected data was then analyzed using content analysis techniques to group the data based on the main themes found in the literature. The use of literature review methods in this research was chosen to delve into cyberbullying as a triggering factor for depression in students in order to provide a better understanding of the topic and to serve as a basis for developing effective strategies in cyberbullying behavior intervention.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors Causing Cyberbullying

The vulnerability of adolescents to cyberbullying is a complex issue influenced by the interaction of various factors, including individual dimensions, social aspects, and the use and access to digital technology. Individual factors that are key to increasing the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents include a lack of social skills and conflict resolution abilities, insufficient digital literacy, and vulnerable mental and emotional health conditions. From a social perspective, peer pressure, cultural differences, gender and sexual orientation, as well as a lack of social support from family and the environment, contribute to this vulnerability. Meanwhile, technology-related factors include weak online security and privacy, easy access to social media and instant messaging applications, and exposure to negative or violent content in cyberspace (Dewi et al., 2023).

This view is supported by findings from other studies. (Afralia & Safitri, 2024) and (Wijaya et al., 2022) correlate the high cases of cyberbullying among adolescents with anonymity in cyberspace, a lack of concern for consequences, environmental factors, parenting styles, and low digital literacy. On the other hand, (Antama et al., 2020) highlight technological advancements, ignorance of legal risks, imitation of negative behaviors from the environment, especially peers, as well as weak social oversight from families, schools, and communities.

Furthermore, (H. A. Dewi et al., 2020) identified five categories of triggering factors, namely individual factors (experiences of violence, perception, gender, age, psychological control, and substance use), family factors (parenting style, family support, and parental stress), peer support, type of school, and intensity of internet use. In line with this, (Jalal et al., 2021) categorized the factors triggering cyberbullying into internal and external factors. Internal factors include characteristics of the perpetrators and victims, such as lack of empathy, lack of understanding of digital ethics, and bad habits in using social media. Meanwhile, external factors are more related to the rapid development of technology and easy access to social media, which create greater opportunities for the occurrence of cyberbullying.

From the various findings above, it can be concluded that adolescents' vulnerability to cyberbullying is complex and multifactorial. The triggers include individual factors (for example, lack of social skills and digital literacy), social factors (peer pressure, lack of support), and technological factors (weak privacy, easy access). Online anonymity, weak oversight, as well as internal and external characteristics of individuals further exacerbate the risk of cyberbullying.

3.1.2 Forms of Cyberbullying

Teenagers engage in cyberbullying for various reasons, including dislike for certain individuals, the desire to throw insults through harsh and inappropriate words, and the aim of seeking attention or negative entertainment from other internet users (Riswanto & Marsinun, 2020). In line with this, (Marlef et al., 2024) also found that cyberbullying is a form of violence in the virtual world through social media, text messaging, and online games that is aggressive in nature, aimed at degrading and damaging the victim's reputation, and has serious impacts on mental health. Similarly, (Diannita et al., 2023) state that cyberbullying involves online harassment through sending harsh messages or comments.

Williard (Karyanti & Aminudin, 2019), 20 classifies cyberbullying into seven main forms that commonly occur in the digital realm, including 1) Flaming, which is the act of sending aggressive, provocative, or vulgar messages aimed at a specific individual through online groups, emails, or other text messages; 2) Online Harassment, which refers to the behavior of sending offensive messages

repeatedly to someone through digital media with the intent to disturb or terrorize; 3) Cyberstalking, which is the behavior of sending offensive messages repeatedly to someone through digital media with the purpose of disturbing or terrorizing; 4) Denigration (put-downs), which is the spreading of negative, untrue, or harmful statements about another individual, either in written form or other digital content; 5) Masquerade, which is the attempt to impersonate someone else online to disseminate information that defames or damages the victim's reputation, 6) Outing means the dissemination of someone's personal, confidential, or embarrassing information to the public without consent, including the distribution of private messages or images; 7) Exclusion refers to the deliberate act of excluding or isolating an individual from an online group or community as a form of painful social rejection.

Of the seven categories, "flaming," which is the sending of messages that are harsh, provocative, or vulgar, has become one of the most common forms of cyberbullying among teenagers. This is evidenced by findings from (Putri & Savira, 2023) at SMAN 3 Rantau Utara, where many flaming cases occurred in the 11th grade, involving the continuous sending of harsh messages via SMS/messenger/social networks because of feeling hurt by someone. Similarly, reported that the flaming category of cyberbullying behavior among students at SMA Taman Siswa Padang is at a high level (31.00%) compared to the six other categories of cyberbullying.

(Marbun, 2024) highlights the case of cyberbullying experienced by two teenagers in Medan, RO and VG. Both victims frequently faced 'flaming,' which is the act of sending harsh messages or comments, being confrontational, and provoking emotions on social media. RO and VG repeatedly received messages full of anger and profanity, both in WhatsApp groups and on other social media platforms. Specifically, RO often became the target of confrontational comments that attacked his self-esteem on social media, while VG experienced similar insults, particularly in the class WhatsApp group.

From the data, it can be concluded that flaming is one of the acts of cyberbullying that often occurs, especially among teenagers, which shows a high prevalence of flaming in schools, whether through direct messages or social media groups, where victims receive verbal attacks targeting their self-esteem.

3.1.3 *The Impact of Cyberbullying*

Teenagers who are active on social media often express their emotions through these platforms, such as anger, in the form of insults and slurs. This behavior of cyberbullying significantly impacts the psychological, physical, and social aspects of both the victims and the perpetrators (Kumala & Sukmawati, 2020). Victims of cyberbullying may react in various ways, including seeking revenge, withdrawing from social interactions, stopping their routine activities, or even potentially becoming cyberbullies themselves (Putri & Savira, 2023).

More specifically, (Hana & Suwarti, 2020) explain that adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying experience psychological disturbances divided into three aspects, namely cognitive, affective, and conative. In the cognitive aspect, victims have difficulty concentrating and experience a decline in academic performance. In the affective aspect, victims feel anger, shame, sadness, revenge, fear, discomfort, and a loss of self-confidence. In the conative aspect, victims' reactions vary, from retaliating against the perpetrator in a similar way or committing physical violence, to choosing to remain silent, avoiding, blocking, and reporting the incidents to their parents or school counselors.

In line with Ni'mah (2023), it adds that cyberbullying not only leads to a decline in academic performance and social isolation but also has a significant impact on the mental health of adolescents, triggering conditions such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. This impact can damage the self-

esteem and identity of adolescents, which if left unaddressed, will worsen their mental condition in the long term.

3.2. Depression

One of the serious impacts of cyberbullying on the mental health of victims is depression (Siroj & Zulfa, 2024; Tsani et al., 2024). Depression is often seen as a warning signal as it can indicate a high risk of individuals committing suicide. Wright (1993) defines depression as a spectrum of conditions that encompasses everything from mild sadness to severe helplessness (Haksasi & Dewi, 2020). Therefore, it is very important to recognize the signs of depression and other mood changes, considering the difficulty in distinguishing between someone who is just depressed and those who are at risk of ending their life.

3.2.1 Factors Causing Depression

Wright (Haksasi & Dewi, 2020) identifies the characteristics of depression, which include: feelings of despair, loss of hope, sadness and apathy, as well as a loss of perspective in life. Research by (F. S. Putri et al., 2022) found that depression can be caused by several factors, including bullying, psychosocial factors, the quality of relationships with parents, and gender. Adolescent girls who tend to have neurotic traits and are more easily stressed have been found to be more vulnerable to depression. The impacts of depression explained in this literature include feelings of hopelessness, lack of self-confidence, feeling depressed, suicidal ideation, and nutritional disorders.

One of the common causes of depression in the digital age is cyberbullying. Adolescents, especially those in middle school ages (14-24 years), are very vulnerable to becoming victims and experiencing depression, particularly if they feel unable to cope with the situation or isolated from friends and family. This type of depression can affect various aspects of daily life, such as routines, eating habits, and sleep, requiring serious medical attention. Interviews with several victims of cyberbullying indicate that they experience excessive fear, which triggers anxiety and worry throughout the day. This anxiety disrupts their activities and makes them more sensitive, even leading them to snap at those around them (Purnomo & Fasya, 2022).

3.2.2 The relationship between Cyberbullying, Depression, and Suicide Risk

(Seprianasari, 2021) indicate a significant relationship between cyberbullying and the emergence of suicidal thoughts among adolescents. Teenagers who are victims of online bullying, such as mockery, insults, or the dissemination of personal information, have a higher risk of having suicidal thoughts compared to those who do not experience it. This is due to severe mental and emotional pressure, including feelings of sadness, shame, and hopelessness, which are often exacerbated by feelings of loneliness and lack of support. At the adolescent age, with limited emotional management skills, they are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of cyberbullying.

Furthermore, the findings of (Tabares et al., 2024) indicate that depression is likely the primary mechanism linking bullying with an increased risk of suicide. Bullying can trigger or exacerbate depression in individuals who experience it, which in turn increases the victim's vulnerability to suicidal actions.

(Sanderan & Marrung, 2021) identified five main reasons why young people make the decision to commit suicide, namely family issues, economic problems, bullying, love life, and being introverted.

Problems that are kept to themselves can lead to stress, depression, and ultimately lead the victims to decide to end their lives. The research by (Purnomo & Fasya, 2022) through interviews with four informants who were victims of cyberbullying also reinforces this. Some informants admitted to having thought about suicide, and even some had attempted it. This condition arose because they felt very hopeless and could no longer bear the shame caused by the cyberbullying they experienced. Nevertheless, some of them reconsidered their intention to commit suicide because they thought about the feelings of their family who would be left behind. However, there were also informants who stated that although they continuously experienced cyberbullying, they never thought about or intended to commit suicide, even though feelings of despair often come.

3.3. Implications in Guidance and Counseling Services

There are several Guidance and Counseling (BK) services that can be used as preventive measures against cyberbullying, including group guidance using sociodrama techniques and group counseling using reframing techniques.

3.3.1. Group guidance services using sociodrama techniques

Group guidance is a support service provided to individuals within a group to help them grow into stronger and more independent individuals (Pranoto, 2024). This service facilitates the delivery of information and discussions on various issues, including education, employment, personal life, and social matters.

One technique that can be effectively applied in group guidance is sociodrama. This technique utilizes role-playing to represent real social issues faced by students. Sociodrama becomes a strategic medium for conveying moral and social messages because it allows students not only to understand but also to directly experience the impact of certain behaviors in specific situations. Research by (Asri, 2024) and (Puspita et al., 2023) shows that the implementation of sociodrama in group guidance significantly reduces cyberbullying behavior among students. At the State Junior High School of Madiun City, group guidance with sociodrama helps students understand the adverse effects of cyberbullying and decreases such behavior (Asri, 2024). Additionally, (M. A. Putri et al., 2022) emphasize that role-playing techniques are effective in fostering student empathy as they are invited to directly experience the situation of the victims through the roles they play.

The integration of group guidance and sociodrama techniques increases the effectiveness of cyberbullying prevention. Group guidance provides a safe space for discussion and social learning, while sociodrama offers a practical approach that touches on the affective and behavioral domains of students. Thus, students are not only equipped with knowledge about the dangers of cyberbullying but are also trained to respond appropriately through the emotional and social experiences gained from role-playing. This collaboration becomes an informative and transformative preventive effort in shaping students' character to be caring, responsible, and ethical in their interactions in the digital world.

According to (Puspita et al., 2023) the implementation of group guidance using sociodrama techniques for cases of cyberbullying involves five main stages: 1) Initial Information Provision: Group members are given an explanation about group guidance using sociodrama techniques, including the context of the cyberbullying case, followed by role distribution according to the topic of the issue, 2) Role Understanding: Each group member deepens their understanding of the assigned roles, 3) Role Practice:

Group members practice their respective roles according to the characters they have understood, 4) Implementation and Discussion: Sociodrama is performed, followed by a general discussion about cyberbullying, 5) Reflection and Appreciation: Group members are given the opportunity to express the lessons learned, as well as to receive motivation and appreciation after the group guidance session ends.

3.3.2. Group counseling service using reframing technique

Research findings show that the reframing technique is effective in changing an individual's mindset by helping them to view an event from a more positive and constructive perspective (Hati et al., 2024; Qurani et al., 2024). In line with this, (Hidayati & Widyana, 2021) found that group counseling using the Reframing technique has the potential to reduce bullying behavior, particularly by focusing on recognition, awareness, meaning-making, and transformation of negative emotions.

The reframing technique is expected to help individuals view problems more broadly, see themselves and others more positively, and increase self-awareness. This technique also has the potential to be an effective alternative for students displaying cyberbullying behavior. In group counseling, reframing can be applied when clients face thoughts, evaluations, or beliefs that may be causing psychological disturbances. This process involves identifying, evaluating, and modifying those negative thoughts to help clients view situations from a more balanced and positive perspective. Based on various findings that have been presented, it can be concluded that the reframing technique is an effective method in supporting changes in an individual's mindset towards a more positive direction.

Based on various findings that have been presented, it can be concluded that reframing techniques are an effective method in supporting the individual's shift towards a more positive mindset. In the context of group counseling, this technique is not only beneficial for addressing negative behaviors such as bullying and cyberbullying, but also plays an important role in helping individuals manage emotions, increase self-awareness, and create new meanings that are more adaptive to the situations they face.

Thus, the group guidance approach using sociodrama techniques and group counseling with reframing techniques can be an effective strategy in reducing bullying and cyberbullying behavior among adolescents. The reframing technique helps individuals change negative perceptions into positive ones, while sociodrama allows students to understand and feel the impact of bullying behavior through the roles they play. The combination of these two techniques can enhance emotional awareness, empathy, and social skills among students, which can ultimately prevent and reduce cyberbullying behavior.

4. Conclusions

The findings from this research indicate that cyberbullying among adolescents is a complex issue triggered by a combination of individual factors (such as a lack of digital literacy), social factors (peer pressure), and technological factors (weak online privacy and easy access to social media). Anonymity in the digital world further exacerbates this risk. Various forms of cyberbullying have been identified, with "flaming" (sending hostile or provocative messages) being one of the most common forms. Its impact is serious on the psychology of adolescents, leading to depression and even risk of suicide. Depression often serves as a primary link between online bullying and suicidal thoughts, particularly among teens who feel isolated. Therefore, guidance and counseling services play a crucial role in the prevention and

handling of cyberbullying. Group guidance using sociodrama techniques has proven effective in fostering empathy, while group counseling with reframing techniques helps change negative thought patterns. The combination of these two approaches is essential for building positive character and providing crucial support for victims of cyberbullying.

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