
Cyberbullying at the Workplace and its Impact on Employee Job Performance

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1

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Abstract – Cyberbullying in the workplace is a very crucial issue in this modern era. Today, many people have neglected this issue as they think cyberbullying in the workplace is a minor issue that can be avoided. Cyberbullying poses a serious threat to the workplace and is associated with feelings of organizational injustice, mental strain, and job discontent. However, if this continues, it may have a negative impact on the people and the organization. A happy employee will perform well in the workplace and increase productivity. The negative consequences of workplace cyberbullying are well-documented. As a result, cyberbullying in the workplace and employee job satisfaction/performance have become very popular research topics, and to ensure that all employees are satisfied. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of workplace cyberbullying acts on employees' job performance. This study employs descriptive research and survey methodology to investigate the relationship between workplace cyberbullying and employee job performance. Cyberbullying at the workplace acts as the independent variable and employees' job performance is the dependent variable.

Keywords: "Workplace", "Cyberbullying", "Employee Job Performance", "Psychological Distress".

1. Introduction

Cyberbullying has long been associated with children and adolescents. However, current research indicates that workplace cyberbullying affects adult employees as well. Cyberbullying is a major workplace hazard that causes job dissatisfaction, psychological stress, and perceived organizational injustice (Coyne et al., 2017). Although workplace cyberbullying has yet to be fully operationalized, constructs of cyberbullying have emerged and are generally conceptualized as, "repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals, or a group of workers, directed towards an employee or groups, which are purposely intended to

intimidate, degrade, humiliate, and undermine others, or creates a risk to the health and safety of the employees including their physical, emotional, and psychological safety”.

A formal definition and conceptualization of workplace cyberbullying is all negative behaviour originating from the work context and occurring through the use of information and communication technologies, whether it is done so repeatedly over time or at least once but intrudes on someone's privacy, (potentially) making it visible to a large online audience. Inappropriate emails, email threats, propagating malicious rumours online, deleting someone's work file, and sending emails to a third party with the goal to hurt or embarrass the target are some instances of workplace cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying appears to cause psychological harm to victims. It has been noted that cyberbullying explains part of the variation in psychological harm above and beyond that caused by traditional bullying. When compared to traditional harassment, online harassment may be more strongly linked to substance abuse and depression than bullying. Cyberbullying victimization predicted depression and seemed to have a strong emotional impact that is independent of traditional bullying. Cyber bullies' behaviour can leave targets feeling helpless and vulnerable and it's reported that employees who have experienced being bullied feel unhappy and stressed. This can have an impact on employee productivity. Bullying at work affects businesses and industries negatively. Due to their fear of losing their employment, many bullied employees are afraid to report the behaviour. This demonstrates that mental health problems are affecting employees more frequently, which can cause staff absences and have a detrimental impact on an organization's productivity and effectiveness.

Few journals have addressed the issue of this anti-social behaviour and it has appeared that cyberbullying at the workplace has a direct impact on employee's job performance. In addition, bullying behaviour creates feelings of defencelessness and injustice in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work, which may lead to reduced performance and finally to leaving work. Therefore, the problem of the study can be stated in the following question “what are the impacts of cyberbullying in the workplace on the employees' job performance outcomes?” Evidence of how an employees' is affected by this phenomenon is demonstrated below.

A 16-year-old girl took her own life in 2019, after sharing an Instagram survey inquiring her followers if she should die - and 69% of them said she ought to. A daily newspaper reported that the victim jumped to her death from her home in east Malaysia, Sarawak after she provoked others on social media to vote “death” or “life,”. In another case, a 20-year-old woman was found dead at her home in Penang in 2020. The victim is believed to have committed suicide after a TikTok video of her with a colleague went viral on Facebook. The victim's sister said her sister had been getting cruel comments on the Internet since she was spotted with a Nepali colleague in the video. A news portal said that the victim committed herself after being humiliated by the opinions of internet users.

In an article by Channel News Asia (June 3, 2020), Dr Anuradha Rao commented that “Cyberbullying in the workplace is on the rise. Repeated uncivil, hostile, and improper contacts via technology are used to exploit power and gender imbalances. Outside of these formal institutional spaces, social media platforms offer the perfect opportunity for cyberbullying and other types of online harassment, such as trolling, stalking, and abuse. image-based sex abuse”.

According to Business/News by JS Lee (August 16, 2021), the President of Malaysia Cybersecurity Outreach and Capacity Building, Lt Col ® Mustaffa Ahmad stated that in 2020 Cybersecurity received 596 allegations of cyberbullying or badgering compared to 201 reports in 2019. Furthermore, Mustaffa stated that the government (Communications and Multimedia Ministry - KKMM) is drafting laws to tackle the growing problem of cyberbullying. According to Mustaffa, under the new laws, the prosecution process for cyberbullying would no longer be based on other acts, including Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1988 (Improper use of network facilities) as is being practiced currently. Cyberbullying in the workplace has caused significant issues to employee job performance. According to the journals, cyberbullying victims, who are employees, have had an impact on their productivity and motivation at work. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, may contribute to physiological consequences for employees. In general, this exploratory study looks at the impact of cyberbullying in the workplace towards the employee’s job performance, as well as the extent to which they reflect existing norms. The objective of the study is to determine the cause-effect of cyberbullying in the workplace, and its effects on employees’ job performance.

2. Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to identify how cyberbullying at the workplace influences the job performance of employees, and indirectly influences the profit of the company. Cyberbullying happened in the internet world, where people engaged in it most of the time. The internet and social media have no gatekeeper, it allows people to publish any content. It allowed people to have freedom of speech, but at the same time it also allowed false content, the content can be viral within hours or seconds. In addition, cyberbullying can cause psychological distress, depression, and other psychological diseases. The worse could cause someone to commit suicide. The cyber world can’t keep a secret, if any employee suicide because of the workplace, the story will go viral and, it will influence the reputation of the company.

According to the research conducted by Joseph Johnson, the overall awareness of cyberbullying in selected countries worldwide in April 2018, Malaysia has the highest cyberbullying awareness. However, we could see vicious words all over Malaysia’s social media, media websites, chat groups, and so on. As reported by Comparitech, a tech review site in 2018 study mentioned Malaysia was ranked sixth place out of 28 countries surveyed for cyberbullying, and second in Asia. In the research of Forssell conducted in 2016 (Forssell, 2016), women are more likely to be targeted as the target of cyberbullying, men

are less likely to be the victim. The content of cyberbullying could be sexual content, editing someone's picture into a naked body; faking a story, it could be defamed someone accepting a bride etc.

A study by Vranjesa et al. (2017, p. 326) found that cyberbullying in the workplace caused apparent pressure, which predicted worker dissatisfaction with their employment. The findings also revealed that female employees who were cyberbullied were more likely than male employees to feel significant pressure and be dissatisfied with their work. Jönsson et al. (2017) indicated that the connection between engaging in cyberbullying and aspects such as health, overall well-being, level of engagement at work, and the inclination to leave one's job, can be influenced by the moderating role of the social organizational environment. Unlike prior research on face-to-face bullying, the study discovered that cyberbullying had a higher indirect than direct impact on health, well-being, work engagement, and the desire to leave."

The internet represents the innovation of technology, compared to real-life bullying, cyberbullying extends its "audience" to strangers on the internet. Although it has not caused any physical wounds, it could cause serious mental illness. Psychological distress is a mental illness, which could affect the employee not only job performance and social interactions. It is a vicious cycle when a person gets cyberbullied and it influences his or her job performance, and social interactions. They are more likely to suffer from depression. On the other hand, in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, humans have three kinds of needs, which is basic needs (food, shelter, water, security), then psychological needs, (intimate relationships, friends, prestige, and feeling of accomplishment), and self-fulfillment needs. The greatest happiness is when someone achieves or gets self-fulfillment needs.

Cyberbullying can make someone feel unsafe and insecure. If the company couldn't provide safety needs, and make their employee feel safe, it is more likely the employee will leave the company. Employee productivity is something that makes a company make money. For example, an engineer provides their skill and idea to the company, and the engineer creates a brand-new robot model. Then the company produces the robot model for the market. The company makes a profit from selling the robot. However, if the engineer was cyberbullied by their co-workers, because of jealousy or other reasons, and the company ignored the incident, it might influence the creative engineer's performance or resign and move to another company to become the company's competitor.

Malaysia relies on the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission 1998 (MCMC), Section 233 to prosecute cyberbullies. According to the segment, it stated that it is illegal to share any rude, obscene, false, threatening, or insulting materials where these actions are considered an offense. Hence, Malaysia does have a Defamation Act to protect people's reputations, however, it is civil law. This means if people want to use the law to protect their rights, they have to raise the issue, to sue the cyberbully (or defamer).

3. Research Methodology

A survey questionnaire about “Cyberbullying in the workplace and its impact on employee job performance” was distributed to 444 working adults. The survey consists of components such as demographics, general information on cyberbullying, psychological distress, and employee job performance. Table 1 shows the data collected on 444 working adults from any organization selected to be part of this sample with full respondents.

Table 1: Questionnaire Response Rate

Response	Frequencies
No. of circulated questionnaire	444
Give back questionnaire	444
No to Cyberbullying in Workplace questionnaire	34.7%
Yes, to Cyberbullying in Workplace questionnaire	65.3%
Response rate %	100%

4. Statement of Hypothesis

This study focuses on techniques of hypothesis analysis and prediction that will be the outcome that usually involves proposing a possible relationship between two variables: independent variable and dependent variable. The research framework can be formulated as follows:

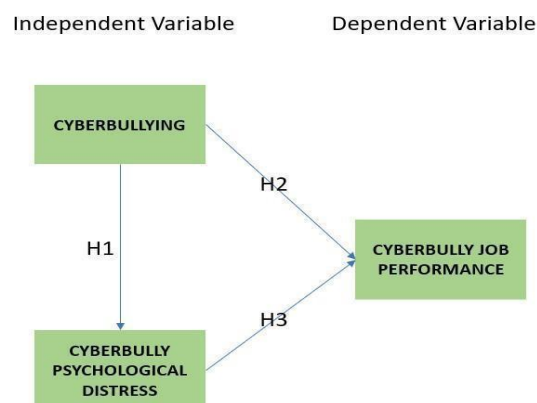


Figure 1: Hypothesis Framework

H1: There is a significant relationship between Cyberbullying and Psychological Distress

H2: There is a significant relationship between Cyberbullying and Employee Job Performance

H3: There is a significant relationship between Psychological Distress and Employee Job Performance

5. Finding Analysis

This paper analyses the relationship between the variables that prove employee job performance is affected once they experienced cyberbullying in their workspace. Cyberbullying in the workspace has increased significantly alongside the evolution of technology, especially the internet. The study involved 444 people from various backgrounds of social life and career paths. The questionnaire is distributed using social media platforms namely WhatsApp instant messaging. The questionnaire is developed using Google form and distributed accordingly. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and the outcomes of the study revealed that 65.3 percent of the respondents which is 290 people have experienced cyberbullying at their workplace. The sample of the study consisted of 290 respondents that have experienced or heard about cyberbullying at work in their workspace.

This research demographic includes age group, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education level, working experience, and experience with cyberbullying. Giving to the rate circulation analysis, 43% of respondents were males and 57% were female. The next variable of demographics is age group. Based on the sample result, the characteristics of respondents were categorized into 4 ranges. A larger group of respondents are from the age group of (30-39) years with 44% of responses. Next is the age group of (20 - 29) with 29% followed by the age group of (40 – 49) with 20% and the last respondent belongs to the age group (Above 50) with 6% responses. This clearly indicates that various ranges of age groups have responded to the questionnaire.

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Four ranges of working experience have been tabulated. The majority of respondents have 2 to 5 years of working experience that equal to 32% of the overall respondents. Followed by those who had more than 5 to 10 years of experience. 20% of respondents have less than 2 years of working experience and 19% have more than 10 years of working experience. Lastly is cyberbullying experience among the respondent. 36% of the respondent has ever heard or experienced one issue of cyberbullying. 28% has experienced 2 issues of cyberbullying and 29% of the respondent has experienced 3 issues of cyberbullying. Based on the result of the survey analysis, only 5% of the respondents have encountered 5 issues

with cyberbullying and only 1% have experienced more than 5 issues in cyberbullying. From the data gathering, all 290 respondents have experienced and heard about cyberbullying.

On the questionnaire of who is the potential cyberbully in their working environment, 153 responded naming co-workers as their highest potential. Respondents also highlighted that they would prefer human resources to handle their cyberbully issue rather than an immediate supervisor or higher management. 78.6% of respondents were willing to report should they have been cyberbullying victims. Human resource department has been named as the main venue to report such incidents within the organization. Respondents believed the issue should be brought forwards for justice and career security. Respondents are also asking about the seriousness of cyberbullying at their workplace. 172 respondents stated that cyberbullying is a minor problem at their workplace. 27.9% agreed that cyberbullying is a moderate problem in their workplace. 14 respondents have indicated that cyberbullying is a serious problem and only 23 respondents decline to consider cyberbullying as an issue in their workplace.

Further analysis is conducted to support the assumption of normality and linearity. For normality, the residual of the outcome variable of cyberbullying victimization should be normally distributed. It can be seen on the histogram of the standard residual value (ZRESID) against the standardized predicted value (ZPRED). The test that has been conducted shows the data seemed to be normally distributed after the score in the middle shows the greatest frequency compared to the extreme score which is smaller.

Besides that, the residual must be linear or have a straight-line relationship with the dependent variable (Pallant, 2016). By plotting the ZRESID against the ZPRED, the linearity of the assumption can be determined. The other test performed in order to find the normality is through Skewness and Kurtosis test. Based on the test performed the outcome from the three variables shows the values are assumed to be inline. A reliability test was conducted on Cyberbullying Victimization, Cyberbullying Psychological Distress, and Cyberbullying Job Performance. The result shows a high-reliability coefficient alpha value for all variables. From the study, the value shows, $\alpha = 0.97$ for cyberbullying victimization, $\alpha = 0.96$ for cyberbullying psychological distress, and $\alpha = 0.98$ for cyberbullying job performance, *t*. Compared to the pilot test, it is found that the bigger sample size also has increased the value of Cronbach alpha. Meanwhile, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity will test the hypothesis that the variables may not be related. If the significant value indicates a small value or less than 0.05, the factor analysis may be useful to the data. KMO and Bartlett's values for the variables are more than 0.50 with a significant value $p < .001$, which means that the data is appropriate to be analyzed further in the factor analysis.

Descriptive statistics are used to describe, examine, and summarize the main features of collected data quantitatively. The analysis shows the standard deviation for CBV, CBP, and CBJP is 0.75, 0.70, and 0.80 respectively.

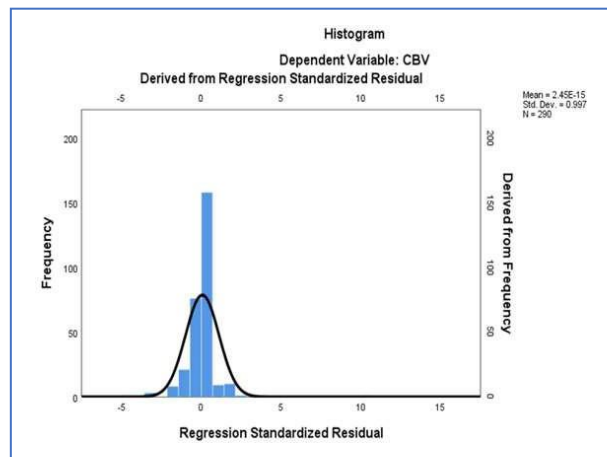


Figure 2: Histogram Chart

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Construct

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CBV	290	1.57	5.00	4.38	0.7454
CBPD	290	1.89	5.00	4.41	0.6924
CBJP	290	1.00	5.00	4.38	0.7758
Valid N (listwise)	290				

The correlation analysis determines whether and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. For example, it is used to measure the relationship strength between the dependent and independent variables. The correlation analysis represents that the value of correlation between independent variables and dependent variables is consistent between .86 and .88. It also indicated a strong relationship between the variables (CBV, CBP, and CBJP). These results indicate that CBV has a significant relationship with cyberbullying psychological distress and cyberbullying job performance. Thus, it can conclude that cyberbullying victimization, cyberbullying psychological distress, and cyberbullying job performance were correlated with cyberbullying having a significant impact on job performance.

In regression analysis, all independent variables cyberbullying victimization, cyberbullying psychological distress, and cyberbullying job performance were entered into the regression analysis, explaining a total variance of 90%, $F = 606.63$, $p < .000$ in intention to prove to cyberbully impact job performance with bootstrapped replications of 1000 samples. In this model, only all independent variables were statistically significant, with the Perceived Compatibility ($\beta = .50$, $p < .005$). The three variables recorded a higher beta value of above .80. Beta value for cyberbullying victimization is recorded at ($\beta = .80$, $p < .000$), beta value for cyberbullying psychological distress is recorded at ($\beta = .93$, $p < .000$) and beta value for cyberbullying job performance is recorded at ($\beta = .93$, $p < .000$).

In the Anova test the F-value was obtained at 662.68 with a significant value of less than 0.001. This indicates only 1% risk that concludes a difference between the means exists. In other words, there was no significant difference between the means as determined by ANOVA ($F = 662.68, p < .001$). The result also supports that the model is reliable to use in testing the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. In this study, a total of three hypotheses were suggested, and all were accepted on the basis of the above-mentioned value. The first hypothesis was the path from cyberbullying towards employee job performance accepted and the second accepted hypothesis is an indirect path of cyberbullying and its emotional impact on employee job performance through the mediating role of psychological distress. The last hypothesis suggested a significant relationship between job performance and cyberbullying psychological distress due to cyberbullying. Therefore, the given results of the three hypotheses have a significant relationship in this study.

Table 3: Hypothesis Statements

Summarized Result		
Hypothesis Statements		Result
H1	There is a significant relationship between Cyberbullying and Psychological Distress	Accepted
H2	There is a significant relationship between Cyberbullying and Employee Job Performance	Accepted
H3	There is a significant relationship between Psychological Distress and Employee Job Performance	Accepted

6. Discussion

In order to establish the impact of cyberbullying at work among those who have been cyberbullied, this study investigated the link between cyberbullying, psychological distress, and employee job performance. It is conceivable to draw the conclusion that there is a strong link between these behaviours based on the facts provided. The hypotheses that were evaluated in this study were able to be identified. The effects of cyberbullying were investigated, and it was discovered that the majority of cyberbullying victims become overly sensitive to their surroundings and suffer emotional alterations as their focus diverts due to ongoing anxiety and stress (Lai, Mohamad, Lee, Salleh, Sulaiman, Rosli, & Chang, 2017). This study found that cyberbullying has a negative impact on psychological discomfort and the authors' research reveals a link between these characteristics, which is relevant to our research goal of determining whether cyberbullying has an impact on an employee's psychological well-being.

As a result of uncontrollable and persistent workplace cyberbullying, a hostile work atmosphere develops, resulting in a loss of productivity. According to a study by Karthikeyan (2020), even established and sophisticated countries are experiencing lost

productivity in the workplace as a result of cyberbullying. Due to the increased employee absenteeism, more attrition, and increased recruitment as a result of workplace cyberbullying, the researcher points out that when productivity drops, it has an influence on an organization's profitability. As a consequence, companies must consider these implications and adopt preventive measures in keeping a healthy and productive working environment. Cyberbullying would result from traumatic impact or psychological distress, which makes people feel weak, lose concentration, and powerless, and it haunts them even after they have left work (Raja, Javed, & Abbas, 2017). Employees may experience anxiety because of being cyberbullied on a regular or long-term basis, which might lead to a decline in output due to increased absenteeism.

According to our findings, various studies have been undertaken on the effects of psychological discomfort on work performance. According to Jones and Andrew (2019) results, cyberbullying has a major influence on employees' professional advancement and psychological well-being. Another researcher noted that the more intense and frequent cyberbullying is, the more mental stress the employee must deal with, which might negatively impact the employee's quality of work-life (Schimmel & Nicholls, 2017).

7. Conclusion

Several studies on workplace cyberbullying have been undertaken, and this one is particularly eye-opening because this behaviour is taken seriously because it occurs over the Internet instead of in person. This study helps victims of cyberbullying understand the severity of cyberbullying's impact on their psychological well-being and work performance, as well as the need of taking preventative measures to avoid being a victim. Cyberbullying appears to have a positive, significant, and direct association with psychological distress and employee work performance, whereas psychological distress appears to have a direct relationship with work performance, according to our data collection. In conclusion, the proposed measure may help colleagues, supervisors, human resources, and professionals in recognizing critical situations immediately and assisting employees in deep reflection on cyberbullying and its victims, thereby promoting a more general understanding of the characteristics of this phenomenon.

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