



## ADOLESCENT CYBERBULLYING AND DIGITAL HARM: ALIGNING GLOBAL EVIDENCE WITH MALAYSIA'S POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS (2013–2025)

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### Abstract:

This semi-systematic review (2013–2025), guided by PRISMA 2020 and a systems-thinking lens, consolidates global and Malaysian scholarship on adolescent cyberbullying within the broader domain of digital harm governance. The review examines how evidence on mental health, gendered vulnerability, and cultural context aligns with Malaysia's policy and regulatory instruments, including the Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025, and the Online Safety Act 2025. Internationally, research demonstrates conceptual maturity through longitudinal and intersectional designs that connect cyberbullying with depression, anxiety, and identity based harm. Malaysian studies are expanding but remain largely descriptive and under theorized, which limits translation into preventive and rights based interventions. Policy analysis indicates partial alignment: national strategies acknowledge digital harm but underutilize empirical insights on adolescent resilience, platform accountability, and gender responsive counselling. This paper contributes by (1) diagnosing methodological and theoretical gaps that weaken evidence informed policy; (2) positioning cyberbullying as a combined digital rights and public health concern requiring coordinated governance; and (3) proposing pathways to integrate global best practices into Malaysia's policy and regulatory systems. Drawing on General Strain Theory and Triadic Reciprocal Determinism, the review advances a governance oriented synthesis that links emotional antecedents, behavioural roles, and gendered coping to concrete policy levers. The analysis situates Malaysia's digital safety efforts within international legal and policy discourse on adolescent protection and online well-being, offering a roadmap for preventive regulation and research–policy convergence.

**Keywords:**

Cyberbullying; Social Media; Adolescent Mental Health; Gender Dynamics; Digital-Harm Governance; Malaysia; Policy Alignment.

## Introduction

Cyberbullying among adolescents has evolved from an interpersonal conflict into a broader issue of digital harm and governance, demanding attention from legal, policy, and public health perspectives. Across global scholarship, cyberbullying is recognised as a complex form of mediated aggression linked to depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and educational disengagement (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Hamm et al., 2015; Selkie, Fales, & Moreno, 2020). UNICEF (2022) reports that one in three adolescents worldwide has experienced online bullying, and one in five has avoided school as a result, an outcome now treated as both a human rights and child protection concern. The spread of algorithm driven social-media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp has reengineered the conditions of adolescent interaction, embedding harassment within everyday digital routines. Within this context, cyberbullying has become a policy and regulatory challenge: a phenomenon shaped not only by user behaviour but by platform governance, algorithmic amplification, and gaps in national accountability mechanisms.

Malaysia reflects these dynamics with growing urgency. Reported cyberbullying cases rose from 3,199 in 2023 to 8,399 by late 2024, positioning cyberbullying as the nation's most frequently recorded cybercrime (MCMC, 2024). Adolescents, particularly those in urban and semi urban environments disproportionately affected; however, national responses remain fragmented across education, health, and communications agencies. While the Education Blueprint 2013–2025 and Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025 acknowledge online risks, their implementation has not fully integrated empirical findings on adolescent distress or gendered vulnerability (Balakrishnan, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). The enactment of the Online Safety Act 2025 marks a pivotal regulatory development, but its preventive and rehabilitative mechanisms have yet to be informed by systematic evidence. Addressing this gap requires bridging research with governance, ensuring that policies, legal instruments, and institutional strategies operate as a coherent system for adolescent digital wellbeing.

This paper has two interrelated objectives. First, it synthesizes global and Malaysian evidence on adolescent cyberbullying between 2013 and 2025, focusing on its intersections with mental health, gendered vulnerability, and cultural context. Second, it assesses the alignment between empirical research and Malaysia's evolving policy and regulatory frameworks, including the Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025, and the Online Safety Act 2025. The analysis, therefore, connects three domains, research, policy, and regulation, within a unified systems perspective.

The study adopts a semi systematic review design guided by PRISMA 2020 procedures and Cabrera's systems lens. Scopus indexed publications across social sciences, psychology, communication, and law were screened to map conceptual and methodological trends. At the same time, policy documents and national frameworks were reviewed to interpret how evidence informs governance. The review contributes to the growing scholarship on digital harm regulation by bridging global theoretical insights and Malaysian implementation realities.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a comparative review of international and Malaysian studies, identifying thematic and methodological trajectories. Section 3 analyses the policy and regulatory landscape governing adolescent cyberbullying in Malaysia, highlighting areas of coherence and fragmentation. Section 4 discusses the synthesis of evidence through a systems governance perspective, proposing pathways for stronger integration of research into policy and law. The paper concludes in Section 5 with implications for regulatory practice, education, and adolescent mental health policy, and outlines directions for future research on digital harm governance in Southeast Asia.

## Literature Review

### *Global Research on Cyberbullying (2013–2025)*

Over the past decade, international scholarship has shifted from mapping prevalence to investigating persistence, mediating factors, and cultural contexts through longitudinal and mixed methods designs (Wright, 2016; Souza, Ferreira, & Silva, 2022). More recently, scholars highlight how platform design and algorithmic amplification sustain harassment, embedding it within digital ecosystems rather than isolated interactions (Lim et al., 2024).

Gender and culture have become central explanatory axes. Research consistently indicates that girls face heightened relational victimisation and psychological distress, while boys are more often identified as perpetrators (Souza et al., 2022; Baltzidis, 2024; Connell et al., 2014). Intersectional and social ecological frameworks explain these vulnerabilities as socially constructed and amplified within digital environments (Wright, 2016). Global syntheses increasingly frame cyberbullying as a structural phenomenon that interacts with platform affordances, social hierarchies, and cultural logics (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Selkie, Fales, & Moreno, 2020; Zsila et al., 2019; Kapitány-Fövény et al., 2022).

### *Malaysian Research on Cyberbullying*

Local scholarship reflects these concerns but remains methodologically limited. Early studies documented behaviours of bullies, victims, and bystanders without theoretical anchoring (Balakrishnan, 2018). More recent surveys report high victimisation rates and associations with family dysfunction, risky health behaviours, and psychological distress (Samsudin, Yaacob, Xin Wee, & Mohamad, 2023). Systematic reviews such as Lian, Tang, and Omar (2023) draw attention to lived experiences but seldom situate them within comparative or policy contexts.

Three weaknesses persist. First, the interaction of gender and culture is rarely analysed, despite global evidence that these strongly mediate both risk and resilience (Souza et al., 2022; Wright, 2016). Second, theoretical frameworks remain marginal: prevalence surveys dominate, while social-ecological perspectives and intersectional analyses are rarely employed. Third, policy translation is weak, with research seldom informing initiatives such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint or MCMC's cyber safety programmes. Collectively, these limitations render Malaysian research descriptive rather than explanatory, reducing its capacity to inform targeted interventions or contribute to global theoretical debates.

### *Comparative Gaps and Theoretical Positioning*

Cross context comparisons reveal a persistent divergence. International research increasingly embeds cyberbullying within social ecological and intersectional frameworks that account for

peer dynamics, cultural expectations, and digital affordances (Wright, 2016; Souza, Ferreira, & Silva, 2022; Liang, Zheng, & Xu, 2022; Wong, Chan, & Cheng, 2018). Longitudinal and mixed methods designs extend this by tracing developmental trajectories and identifying protective factors such as parental monitoring and peer support (Kowalski et al., 2014; Selkie et al., 2020). Bibliometric analyses also highlight theoretical fragmentation, calling for stronger consolidation across frameworks (Ding, Li, & Chen, 2025).

Malaysian work, however, remains anchored in cross sectional surveys with limited theoretical integration. Gendered vulnerabilities, well documented globally, are rarely analysed locally, even though Malaysia's socio cultural diversity almost certainly shapes adolescent experiences of online harm (Balakrishnan, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). Local reviews (Lian et al., 2023) also remain inward looking and disconnected from global syntheses, weakening scholarly visibility and theoretical refinement.

This asymmetry produces two consequences: Malaysian research risks remaining siloed and globally peripheral, while policy makers are left without conceptual tools to anticipate cultural, gendered, and developmental complexities. Advancing beyond this requires methodological diversification and theoretical adoption that embed Malaysian findings within international debates on adolescent wellbeing and digital governance.

### ***Policy Alignment and Research Practice Gap***

The misalignment between empirical evidence and national policy represents a structural weakness. Globally, agencies such as UNICEF (2022) and WHO frame cyberbullying as a joint education public health priority, recommending school-based prevention, platform accountability, and expanded mental health support. Malaysia's initiatives, including the Education Blueprint, Child Act, and MCMC campaigns, reflect rising awareness, and reports confirm that cyberbullying has overtaken scams as the country's leading cybercrime (MCMC, 2024). However, links between empirical findings and policy remain tenuous: evidence on psychological distress (Samsudin, Yaacob, Xin Wee, & Mohamad, 2023) and gendered experiences (Balakrishnan, 2018) are largely absent from school counselling frameworks and awareness campaigns, leaving responses fragmented (Mohamad, Ismail, & Ahmad, 2022; Nasruddin, Jamaludin, & Hassan, 2023).

Weak theoretical grounding further exacerbates this gap. Policies not informed by evidence risk becoming generic and reactive, while legal provisions remain fragmented and insufficiently attuned to adolescent digital harms (Rajamanickam, Ali, & Karim, 2019; Putra, 2024). Comparative studies report stronger outcomes when cybercrime laws are integrated into child protection frameworks (Stylios, Papaioannou, & Karyda, 2016; Ghandour, El Sayed, & El Sayed, 2021). In contrast, Malaysian strategies rarely combine cultural responsiveness with platform accountability, a gap that global research identifies as critical (Wright, 2016; Souza, Ferreira, & Silva, 2022).

To move beyond piecemeal initiatives, Malaysian scholarship requires greater theoretical and methodological sophistication, while national strategies must embed empirical insights to ensure interventions are evidence based, culturally grounded, and internationally aligned. This review highlights that while global scholarship has advanced through longitudinal, intersectional, and theoretically anchored approaches, Malaysian studies remain largely descriptive, under theorised, and weakly connected to policy debates. To make this divergence

visible, Table 1 consolidates the comparative analysis across five critical dimensions, mental health, gender, theoretical positioning, methodological development, and policy integration, illustrating not only the empirical gaps but also the implications these weaknesses create for evidence-based interventions and national strategies.

**Table 1: Comparative Synthesis of Global and Malaysian Research on Adolescent Cyberbullying, Digital Harm, and Policy Regulatory Integration (2013–2025)**

Dimension	Global Research (2013–2025)	Malaysian Research (2013–2025)	Policy–Regulatory Implication
Mental Health Focus	Longitudinal and mixed methods consistently link cyberbullying to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, framing it as a digital health and human-rights issue (UNICEF, 2022; Selkie et al., 2020).	Local research confirms anxiety as the dominant psychological outcome (Samsudin et al., 2023; Kee, Anwar, & Vranjes, 2024) but lacks longitudinal scope or multi factor analysis.	Mental-health policies (e.g., <i>Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025</i> ) need to embed digital harm as a formal risk category and align preventive actions across schools and health agencies.
Gender and Cultural Dynamics	Gendered differences in cyberbullying behavior are well established: females internalize (anxiety, withdrawal) while males externalize (aggression, retaliation) (Souza et al., 2022; Wright, 2016). Intersectional and cultural analyses are common.	Malaysian studies acknowledge gender variation but rarely model it statistically; findings on male–female differences remain inconsistent (Balakrishnan, 2018; Lim et al., 2024).	Policies and school programs should adopt gender responsive prevention frameworks and counselling modules reflecting local sociocultural realities.
Theoretical Positioning	Research increasingly integrates social ecological, intersectional, and systems frameworks to explain cyberbullying as an interaction between individuals, culture, and technology (Wright, 2016; Souza et al., 2022).	Local work remains largely descriptive, though emerging studies grounded in General Strain Theory and Triadic Reciprocal Determinism show movement toward theoretical consolidation (Ayub et al., 2023; Gopinathan et al., 2025).	Strengthen research funding and postgraduate training on theory-based digital harm studies to elevate Malaysia’s theoretical maturity and global visibility.
Methodological Development	Advanced quantitative and qualitative designs, longitudinal tracking, and bibliometric mapping dominate recent international work (Ding, Li, & Chen, 2025).	Surveys and cross-sectional designs predominate; limited use of validated local instruments and predictive modeling reduces analytical depth.	Encourage national datasets and standardized measures of digital harm to enable cross year, cross state trend monitoring.

Dimension	Global Research (2013–2025)	Malaysian Research (2013–2025)	Policy–Regulatory Implication
		(Mohd Zaki et al., 2021; Samsudin et al., 2023).	
Policy–Regulatory Integration	Cyberbullying is increasingly governed under digital rights and child protection frameworks, integrating education, public health, and platform regulation (Stylios et al., 2016; Ghandour et al., 2021).	Malaysia's <i>Education Blueprint 2013–2025</i> , under a unified <i>National Communications and Multimedia Act 1998</i> , connecting education, and <i>Online Safety Act 2025</i> show policy intent but remain weakly empirical findings linked to research and preventive enforcement.	Consolidate governance under a unified National Digital Harm Framework communications, and health sectors; integrate empirical findings to guide implementation of the <i>Online Safety Act 2025</i> .

## Methodology

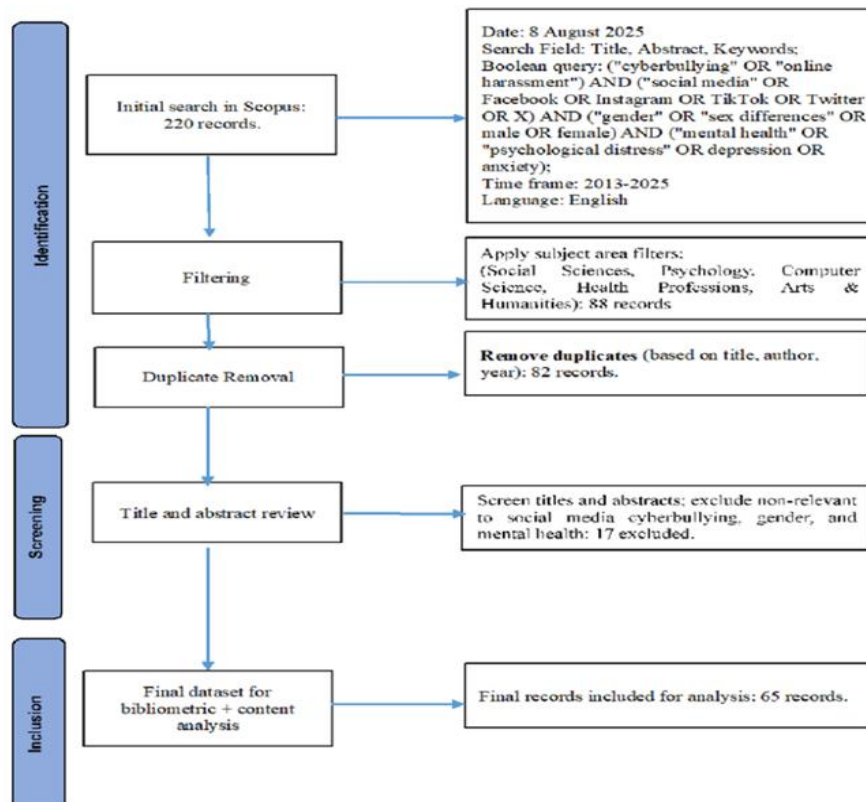
This study adopted a semi systematic literature review (SLR) to consolidate interdisciplinary evidence on adolescent cyberbullying and digital harm, with emphasis on mental health outcomes, gendered vulnerability, and Malaysia's evolving policy and regulatory response. A semi systematic approach was appropriate because the topic spans multiple domains: psychology, communication, education, and governance, where conceptual integration is as crucial as exhaustive coverage (Snyder, 2019). The review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 reporting standards to ensure methodological transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). Scopus was selected as the sole database for its broad multidisciplinary coverage and consistent indexing quality across social science, psychology, and policy journals (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016; Martín-Martín et al., 2018). Google Scholar and other open databases were excluded because of metadata inconsistency and duplication (Haddaway et al., 2015; Harzing & Alakangas, 2016). Searches were limited to 2013–2025, a period representing major changes in social-media ecosystems (Instagram, TikTok, X/Twitter) and the emergence of digital harm governance. Boolean strings combined four conceptual clusters:

Cyberbullying (“cyberbullying” OR “online harassment”);  
Social media (“social media” OR platform names);  
Gender (“gender” OR “sex differences”); and  
Psychological or policy terms (“mental health” OR “anxiety” OR “policy” OR “regulation”).

Only peer reviewed, English language publications within Scopus subject areas relevant to social sciences, psychology, computing, law, and health were included.

The initial search produced 220 records, reduced to 88 after subject area filtering and 82 after duplicate removal. Title and abstract screening excluded papers outside the adolescent or social-media context, yielding 65 final studies for full text review. The selection flow followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines and is summarized in Figure 1. Data extraction captured bibliographic information, study design, platform context, participant role (victim, perpetrator, bystander), gender focus, psychological outcomes, theoretical framework, and any policy or regulatory reference.

Analysis combined structured mapping and thematic synthesis. Structured mapping provided an overview of disciplinary coverage, geographic distribution, and theoretical use across studies, while thematic synthesis identified recurring conceptual and contextual patterns. This qualitative integration enabled the review to interpret how global and Malaysian evidence intersect in shaping the understanding of adolescent cyberbullying, mental health outcomes, and policy regulatory development. The approach thus produced an interpretive synthesis rather than a statistical meta analysis, aligning with the study's goal of connecting empirical knowledge with governance relevance.



**Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Semi-Systematic Review on Cyberbullying, Gender, and Adolescent Mental Health (2013–2025)**

## Findings and Synthesis

This section integrates evidence from global and Malaysian scholarship to interpret how cyberbullying operates as a form of digital harm affecting adolescent mental health, gendered experiences, theoretical development, methodological maturity, and policy regulatory alignment. The synthesis retains interpretive depth rather than numeric generalization, focusing on conceptual and contextual convergence across studies.

### *Adolescent Mental Health*

Global research over the past decade demonstrates that cyberbullying is a sustained determinant of adolescent well being. Longitudinal and mixed method studies consistently connect online aggression with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and reduced academic performance, extending analysis beyond prevalence counts toward developmental trajectories of harm (Hamm et al., 2015; Selkie, Fales, & Moreno, 2020; Zsila et al., 2019; Kapitány-

Fövény, Urbán, & Griffiths, 2022). These findings establish mental health as the central frame for conceptualizing cyberbullying internationally.

In Malaysia, studies reaffirm the seriousness of psychological outcomes but with a narrower scope. Cross sectional surveys reveal strong associations between victimisation, depressive symptoms, and family dysfunction among adolescents and young adults in urban settings (Samsudin et al., 2023). Early descriptive research (Balakrishnan, 2018) noted emotional disturbance among both victims and perpetrators even without a clinical diagnosis. While such work renders the problem visible, reliance on single time point surveys limits causal interpretation and prevents assessment of longitudinal coping trajectories. The result is a knowledge gap that constrains policy translation, national strategies remain reactive rather than preventive because empirical studies have yet to trace developmental mechanisms of distress.

### ***Gender and Identity***

Globally, gender and identity constitute core analytical dimensions. International evidence shows that adolescent girls experience more relational victimisation and internalised distress, whereas boys more often act as perpetrators or targets of direct aggression (Souza, Ferreira, & Silva, 2022; Wright, 2016; Connell et al., 2014). Recent analyses embed gender within intersectional frameworks, linking digital self presentation, peer reputation, and cultural scripts to differentiated risks (Baltzidis, 2024). These studies collectively reveal that gendered and identity based vulnerabilities are socially constructed and technologically amplified.

Malaysian scholarship rarely examines these mediations systematically. Existing surveys identify emotional consequences but seldom test gendered pathways or cultural moderation (Balakrishnan, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). This omission is significant in a context where communal reputation and religious norms strongly influence adolescent disclosure and help seeking. Consequently, national “cyber-safety” campaigns remain universalist, overlooking gender-specific risks and response patterns. Without integration of gender and identity, interventions risk neglecting the adolescents most vulnerable to sustained digital hostility.

### ***Theoretical Positioning***

Explanatory strength in global research stems from theoretical pluralism. Social ecological, intersectional, and systems models explain how peer dynamics, institutional context, and technological affordances interact to sustain harm (Wright, 2016; Souza et al., 2022; Liang, Zheng, & Xu, 2022; Wong, Chan, & Cheng, 2018). Bibliometric syntheses (Ding, Li, & Chen, 2025) confirm consolidation around frameworks that link psychology, sociology, and communication studies.

In Malaysia, theoretical adoption remains sporadic. Most studies document prevalence and correlates but lack anchorage in explanatory frameworks, limiting both depth and international relevance. However, emerging work grounded in General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) and Triadic Reciprocal Determinism (Bandura, 1986) signals movement toward conceptual integration. These perspectives frame cyberbullying as strain induced emotional maladjustment moderated by environmental feedback, aligning well with Malaysia’s socio cultural realities. Expanding this theoretical adoption could strengthen the linkage between empirical results and governance frameworks such as the Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025 and the Education Blueprint 2013–2025.

### ***Methodological Development***

Global research has progressed from descriptive surveys to longitudinal and mixed method designs that capture persistence, mediators, and protective factors. Such designs reveal how parental mediation, peer support, and cultural norms shape resilience (Hamm et al., 2015; Selkie et al., 2020). By contrast, Malaysian studies remain heavily cross-sectional, limiting inference about causality or temporal change (Balakrishnan, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). A few qualitative syntheses (Lian, Tang, & Omar, 2023) and role fluid analyses (Ayub, Ismail, Abdul Rahman, & Anuar, 2023) have added contextual richness but still fall short of the multi-layered designs characterising international work. This methodological imbalance weakens Malaysia's capacity to produce evidence that informs preventive or predictive policy models.

### ***Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Risks***

Internationally, platforms are increasingly examined as active mediators of risk. Studies show that algorithmic amplification and design affordances perpetuate harassment cycles and intensify visibility of harm (Lim, Lee, & Tan, 2024; UNICEF, 2022). In Malaysia, research continues to centre on Facebook and WhatsApp, leaving newer ecosystems such as TikTok, Instagram, and gaming networks empirically underexplored (Balakrishnan, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). This narrow scope obscures how platform design intersects with culture and adolescence to shape risk. Policy consequently remains oriented toward individual awareness rather than platform accountability. Global evidence underscores that adolescent protection now requires algorithmic transparency and platform-governance regulation; domains only recently addressed under Malaysia's Online Safety Act 2025 (Act 866).

### ***Policy Integration and Legal Gaps***

Despite a growing evidence base, research policy translation remains weak. Global agencies such as UNICEF and WHO frame cyberbullying as an education public health nexus requiring integrated governance. Malaysia's frameworks, the Education Blueprint 2013–2025, Child Act 2001, Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025, and Online Safety Act 2025, acknowledge the issue but operate largely in silos. Empirical findings on psychological distress (Samsudin et al., 2023) and gendered vulnerability (Balakrishnan, 2018) have yet to shape national counselling curricula or school protocols. The Penal Code Amendment Act A1695 criminalises severe online harassment, but without consistent enforcement or research based prevention strategies, adolescent protection remains reactive.

Comparative evidence shows stronger outcomes where cybercrime regulation is embedded within child protection systems and linked to educational and mental health policy (Stylios et al., 2016; Ghandour et al., 2021). For Malaysia, advancing toward such integration requires sustained collaboration between regulators, educators, and researchers. Legal reform must be accompanied by evidence driven policy convergence that connects digital governance with adolescent well being.

### ***Synthesis Across Domains***

The comparative analysis reveals a consistent pattern:

1. Global research demonstrates theoretical consolidation, methodological diversification, and regulatory alignment
2. Malaysian scholarship, though expanding, remains descriptive and detached from policy circles.

3. The resulting governance gap weakens the translation of evidence into actionable regulation

Integrating the frameworks of General Strain Theory and Triadic Reciprocal Determinism within Malaysia's legal context offers a pathway forward. By linking emotional antecedents, behavioural roles, and gendered coping to policy levers in the Online Safety Act 2025 and Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025, future research can generate predictive and preventive insights that inform both education and regulation. Strengthening this research policy nexus is essential for achieving coherent digital harm governance aligned with the nation's aspiration for resilient, mentally healthy, and digitally responsible youth.

The synthesis across domains consolidates evidence from both global and Malaysian literature to illustrate how the field of adolescent cyberbullying research has matured unevenly across contexts. While global investigations have progressed towards theoretically grounded, longitudinal, and policy informed models, Malaysian scholarship remains largely descriptive, with limited integration between psychological evidence, sociocultural analysis, and digital governance. This comparative approach clarifies not only where conceptual and methodological gaps persist, but also how these weaknesses restrict the translation of knowledge into effective national interventions.

The synthesis is structured around six analytical dimensions that collectively represent the evolution of research and its policy relevance: mental health outcomes, gender and identity, theoretical anchoring, methodological design, platform and algorithmic risks, and policy integration. Each dimension compares empirical patterns between global and Malaysian studies, revealing both alignments and deficiencies. These contrasts underscore the need for Malaysia to advance from episodic surveys to theoretically connected and policy driven research capable of informing governance frameworks such as the Online Safety Act 2025 and the Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025.

Through this structured comparison, the analysis moves beyond cataloguing findings to interpret how emotional, behavioural, and gendered determinants of cyberbullying intersect with national regulatory systems. The subsequent tables (Table 2 and Table 3) synthesise this evidence base, mapping the comparative patterns and translating them into concrete policy and regulatory linkages that can guide future scholarship and institutional action.

**Table 2: Comparative Summary of Global and Malaysian Findings on Adolescent Cyberbullying (2013–2025)**

Analytical Dimension	Global Evidence (2013–2025)	Malaysian Evidence (2013–2025)	Observed Gap / Alignment
Mental Health Outcomes	Longitudinal studies confirm sustained links between cyberbullying, family anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Selkie et al., 2020; Zsila et al., 2019).	Cross sectional surveys identify distress and family dysfunction but lack causal analysis (Samsudin et al., 2023; Balakrishnan, 2018).	National policies and reference digital risk but lack integration of psychological evidence into intervention frameworks.
Gender and Identity	Intersectional highlight	Gendered differences are noted but rarely modeled	Gender-responsive policy and counselling

Analytical Dimension	Global Evidence (2013–2025)	Malaysian Evidence (2013–2025)	Observed Gap / Alignment
	victimisation among girls statistically; and external aggression cultural influences among boys (Souza et al., 2022; Wright, 2016).	socio-cultural influences are from national frameworks.	socio- programs are absent from national frameworks.
Theoretical Anchoring	Global work adopts social ecological and intersectional models linking culture, identity, and digital context (Liang 2023; et al., 2022).	Limited theoretical use; emerging studies adopt GST and TRD frameworks (Ayub et al., 2025).	Weak conceptual integration constrains translation to policy and law.
Methodological Design	Longitudinal and mixed method studies dominate; bibliometric syntheses consolidate theoretical maturity (Ding et al., 2025).	Surveys and phenomenological studies dominate; a lack of longitudinal design limits trend tracking.	Need for methodological diversification and a national data repository.
Platform and Algorithmic Risks	Studies analyse algorithmic amplification and visibility of harm across TikTok, Facebook/WhatsApp, Instagram, and gaming (Lim et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2022).	Focus remains on new ecosystems.	The evidence gap weakens platform-accountability policy and regulatory monitoring.
Policy Integration	International frameworks connect education, public health, and regulation under digital rights agendas (UNICEF, 2022; WHO, 2020).	Malaysian frameworks (Education Blueprint, Mental Health Plan, and Online Safety Act 2025) exist but lack empirical grounding.	Requires stronger policy convergence for preventive governance.

**Table 3: Mapping Research Themes to Malaysia’s Policy and Regulatory Frameworks (2013–2025)**

Research Domain	Key Empirical Insight	Relevant National Framework / Legislation	Policy–Regulatory Implication
Adolescent Mental Health	Cyberbullying causes long term psychological harm and anxiety.	Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025	Integrate digital harm risk screening into adolescent mental health services.
Gender and Cultural Norms	Gendered experiences shape vulnerability and reporting behavior.	Education Blueprint 2013–2025	Introduce gender responsive and culturally grounded counselling modules.
Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Risks	Platform design and algorithmic amplification sustain harm.	Online Safety Act 2025 (Act 866)	Enforce algorithmic transparency provisions and platform responsibility.

Research Domain	Key Empirical Insight	Relevant National Framework / Legislation	Policy–Regulatory Implication
Theoretical–Empirical Gaps	Weak linkage between evidence and governance models.	Communications and Multimedia Act 1998	Embed evidence based criteria in regulatory risk assessment and youth protection standards.
Research–Policy Interface	Fragmented research dissemination limits uptake.	Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL)	Establish an inter ministerial research council for digital harm governance.

### Limitations and Future Research

This review is bound by several methodological and conceptual limitations. First, the analysis relied exclusively on Scopus-indexed, English-language publications, which may have excluded local language studies and grey literature addressing community level interventions or non academic policy reports. Second, the semi systematic design emphasizes interpretive synthesis rather than statistical generalization, limiting quantitative comparability across datasets. Third, cross national comparisons were constrained by uneven methodological maturity. Global studies frequently employ longitudinal and intersectional designs, whereas Malaysian research remains predominantly cross sectional and descriptive. These differences restrict direct comparability but reveal structural research disparities. Future studies should integrate mixed method and longitudinal designs to examine causal mechanisms linking cyberbullying to mental health and gendered coping within Malaysia’s socio cultural context. Extending collaboration across ASEAN could also foster regional policy benchmarking and strengthen collective evidence for digital-harm governance.

### Conclusion

This study reinforces that adolescent cyberbullying has evolved into a systemic form of digital harm that demands integrated governance across education, health, and communications sectors. Global research from 2013 to 2025 evidences conceptual consolidation through longitudinal, mixed method, and intersectional designs that connect online aggression with social and psychological systems. Malaysian research, while growing, remains largely descriptive and detached from regulatory application. This imbalance underscores the need for stronger evidence policy alignment to enable preventive rather than reactive responses. Malaysia’s legislative and policy ecosystem, anchored in the Online Safety Act 2025, the Mental Health Action Plan 2020–2025, and the Education Blueprint 2013–2025, reflects policy intent but not yet operational coherence. Embedding empirical insights within these frameworks can strengthen algorithmic accountability, gender responsive counselling, and digital risk screening within adolescent health services. The theoretical integration of General Strain Theory and Triadic Reciprocal Determinism provides a foundation for future empirical testing, connecting emotional stress, behavioural adaptation, and governance mechanisms within Malaysia’s socio cultural fabric. Regional collaboration across ASEAN should extend this agenda by situating Malaysia’s initiatives within a broader discourse on adolescent digital rights and online well being. Advancing these directions would mark a decisive shift from awareness-based campaigns to preventive, evidence-informed digital governance that safeguards youth mental health in the algorithmic era.

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