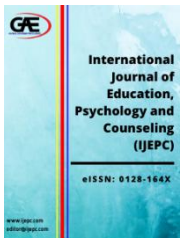
International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X

Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)
https://gaexcellence.com/ijepc

EXPLORING PARENTS' EXPERIENCES TO CHILD CYBERBULLYING: EVIDENCE FROM PENINSULA MALAYSIA

Nurul Shafiza Izzuana Mohd Zahari[1]*, Siti Nur Fathanah Abd Hamid[2], Suhaimi Abd Samad[3]

[1]Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia
2024679004@student.uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5004-3230
[2]Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia
fathanah@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0112-2558
[3]Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia
suhaimi@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7809-1462
*Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:
Received date: 27.07.2026
Revised date: 13.08.2026
Accepted date: 10.09.2026
Published date: 28.09.2026

To cite this document:

Zahari, N. S. I. M., Hamid, S. N. F. A., & Samad, S. A. (2026). Exploring Parents' Experiences to Child Cyberbullying: Evidence from Peninsula Malaysia. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling, 11*(64), 1439-1455.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1164078

Abstract:

The increasing use of digital devices and online platforms among children has created new opportunities for learning and social interaction, but it has also increased the exposure to cyberbullying. While previous studies have largely focused on the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying, less attention has been given to parents' real-life experiences in responding to incidents involving their children. Therefore, this study explores how parents experience and deal with cyberbullying in Peninsular Malaysia. Using a qualitative theory approach, the data were collected through in-depth interviews with parents from diverse backgrounds. The findings show that children experienced several forms of cyberbullying, particularly denigration, harassment, and social exclusion, which affected their emotional and behavioural well-being. Parents primarily adopt communication-based strategies even though many face challenges when engaging with institutional support such as schools and authorities. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening parental support and developing a more structured digital parenting framework to help parents respond effectively to child cyberbullying.

Keyword:

Cyberbullying, Digital Safety, Parental Monitoring

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

© The authors (2026). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact ijepc@gaexcllence.com.

Introduction

In today's increasingly connected world, cyberbullying among children has emerged as a critical issue, where perpetrators use digital platforms to harass, intimidate, and harm others. In this context, cyberbullying encompasses various behaviours such as denigration, harassment, masquerading, and social exclusion, which frequently occur via social media, messaging applications like WhatsApp, and online gaming environments like Roblox. Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying because it can occur continuously and under hidden identities, which subsequently intensifies its psychological and social impact on young victims.

In Malaysia, there has been a significant increase in the use of digital technology among children and adolescents. Consequently, this rise has also heightened concerns regarding cyberbullying and its aftermath. Based on recent national findings, there is a worrying trend in children's mental health, including increased levels of depression and suicidal ideation linked to negative online experiences. At the same time, it not only affects children's emotional and psychological well-being but also disrupts their social relationships, academic engagement, and overall development. As the digital environment shapes children's daily interactions, taking action to address cyberbullying has become a priority for families, educators, and policymakers in Malaysia.

While previous studies have extensively examined the forms and effects of cyberbullying, including the role of parents in gadget and online usage, there remains a significant gap in understanding how parents experience and manage cyberbullying incidents involving their children. Specifically, limited attention has been given to parental experiences, such as how they interpret cyberbullying occurrences, how they respond to their children's needs, and their engagement with agencies such as schools and authorities. This lack of insight hinders the development of practical and context-based support systems for parents.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the real-life experiences of parents in dealing with child cyberbullying, including their interactions with relevant agencies. By focusing on the parents' perspectives, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and realities faced at the family level, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and responsive interventions.

Literature Review

In an era of globalization or a world without borders, we have immediate access to information and digital connection (Siraj et al., 2015). Cyberbullying is a global problem that can result in high-risk behaviors like self-harm, suicidal ideation and aggressive retaliation in children and

adolescents, and calls for urgent intervention. Children exposed to online aggression suffer a range of negative effects that extend far beyond the digital screen (Michael et al., 2021). Despite this awareness, the worrying trend of cyberbullying cases is on the rise. Many parents are unaware of the extent to which their children are experiencing online, making it difficult to fight the problem effectively. As Dehue et al. (2008) noted, the study revealed a significant lack of awareness on the part of parents, with parents consistently underestimating their children's participation in cyberbullying as either victim or perpetrator. Cyberbullying takes many forms; this study seeks to bring attention to three major implications which are: (1) denigration; (2) harassment and; (3) social exclusion.

Denigration - According to research by Bauman (2015), denigration is the act of spreading false, cruel, or malicious information about an individual on digital platforms with the aim of damaging their reputation. This is because denigration in the digital sphere is performative where it depends upon a virtual audience to witness the shame of the victim (Klonick, 2016). For example, toxic rumors or edited photos are circulated on the internet via TikTok or Instagram and the damage is even more because of the viral nature of the internet. This will make the children feel humiliated and ashamed, and it will be a massive blow to their self-esteem and social standing. It clearly shows that denigration is a kind of digital character assassination which is not easy to undo once the material is out.

Harassment – In further discussion, Bauman (2015), defines harassment as the repeated sending of offensive, rude and insulting messages toward a certain person. Patchin and Hinduja (2023) also note that the borderless nature of technology exacerbates harassment in the digital era. The perpetrators can invade the victim's private space any time of the day without any limitations in terms of time and place. Such constant exposure can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and psychological distress in children as they feel that there is no safe haven from the abuse (Agastya et al., 2019). Studies show that 50% of adolescents subjected to cyberbullying receive harassment through text and private direct messaging (Larson, 2024). The constant nagging can make one feel overwhelmed and helpless, and this may affect their day-to-day living and academic performance.

Social Exclusion – Finally, Bauman (2015) describes social exclusion as the act of deliberately removing someone from online groups or social networks. This behavior leads to the children feeling isolated from other people, lacking social skills and feeling rejected by their peers (Charmaraman et al., 2020). To be blocked or removed from a group chat is a mighty tool for marginalization in the modern social landscape and tells the child that they are unwanted. This situation will make the children feel lonely, bored and stressed and may eventually lead to depression (Tsuno et al. 2005). Exclusion is an act of omission; therefore, it is often more difficult for parents to detect than direct harassment, but it has a detrimental effect on the child's psychological well-being and sense of belonging.

Based on the studies above, the three types of cyberbullying are clearly seen to cause severe psychological damage. Victimization can be severe and may cause sleep problems that can impact on daily responsibilities (Baturay & Toker, 2019). Also, lack of sleep and constant stress can put a child at risk of depression and a decrease in social skills. This study shows that all types of cyberbullying, from the public disgrace of denigration to the relentless assault of harassment and the cold exclusion of isolation, demand a holistic strategy to mitigation.

Parents play a key role in mediating these experiences through their communication and monitoring. Open and supportive communication with children allows them to share their experiences, which provides emotional security (Olweus, 1988). However, little is known about how parents negotiate these challenges in real life settings, especially regarding the agencies involved. This study argues that all parties including families, schools and government agencies must collectively tackle cyberbullying. "No man is an island," as the saying goes, and it's important to have collective support to protect kids from the dangers of the digital world.

Method

This study A qualitative phenomenological research design approach grounded in an interpretivist research philosophy was employed in this study to explore parents lived experiences in dealing with child cyberbullying. The phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to understand how individuals perceive, interpret and make sense of their experiences (Burns et al., 2022). The interpretivist also agrees with this method by accepting that parents' experiences and responses may differ from one another according to their social, cultural and personal contexts (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

To answer the objective of this paper, this study involved 8 Malay parents in Peninsular Malaysia, namely Kedah, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan and Johor, 2 parents for each state. The demographic profile developed showed that the informants were 4 mothers and 4 fathers between 25-50 years. This study does not limit the participation involving parents from other ethnic groups. However, only Malay parents are interested and able to cooperate in this study.

The purposive sampling methods were used to select the informants to ensure the informants have direct experience or awareness of cyberbullying issues. To be eligible, the informants needed to be parents of children between 7 and below 18 years of age who had been victims of cyberbullying. Only one parent from each family was chosen and the parents had to have taken some sort of action in response to the incident. These criteria ensured that the participants would be able to provide first-hand accounts that were relevant to the objective of the study.

Data was collected using in-depth and semi-structured interviews with parents sharing their experiences with their children. Interviews were mostly conducted in Malay, with English used where appropriate to participant preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis which involved repeated reading of the transcripts, identification of relevant code, grouping of related codes into categories, and the development and refinement of recurring themes across the participants' accounts. Also, ethical considerations were put in priority during the research process, to further ensure the systematic research process and accuracy of data. Therefore, the research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for approval. The REC reviewed the research aims and design to check for adherence to ethical guidelines and the university's code of conduct.

Findings

From interviews with eight informants, this research found a number of types of cyberbullying suffered by their children. Three main themes emerged from parents' accounts: denigration,

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

harassment, and social exclusion. These forms did not refer to numerical prevalence but to recurrent patterns in the interview data. Denigration was most evident in parents' descriptions of children being criticized, ridiculed or portrayed negatively by their peers through digital platforms. Parents reported incidents including sarcastic comments, criticism of the children's abilities or appearance, circulation of embarrassing digital content, and mocking comments. These experiences often involved attempts to humiliate the child or to negatively affect how peers viewed the child.

Another informant said that her child was cyber bullied through the WhatsApp group chats and status updates. Her child was neglected by peers in the group, and ridiculed and indirectly scorned through WhatsApp status, she explained. In this instance, friends represented the child negatively as a person who pretended to be good in front of teachers and was only chosen for certain activities because she liked to please teachers. The situation could be considered denigration because it involved comments meant to shame and damage the child's reputation among peers. Examples of the statements are as follows:

> "Then we came across a few chats in the WhatsApp group. She would ask questions, but her friends didn't reply, like they were ignoring her […] her friends mocked and sarcastically teased her through WhatsApp statuses […] saying that she was good at flattering the teacher, which is why she was chosen to join certain activities. In front of the teacher, she acts nice, but behind their back she's two-faced—that's what they posted on WhatsApp." (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

> "The ones doing the bullying were also girls. They were classmates, and they used to be close. Then, I'm not sure if there was some misunderstanding […] So we understand that kids fight like that, but now that there is social media, they tend to express their feelings through WhatsApp, so it becomes a form of bullying." (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

Another story narrated by informants also reflected a similar pattern with children being put down by direct degrading comments by peers. "A friend told my child she was not good at playing," said one mother. Another mother shared, "My child's voice recording was criticized and belittled by peers. Similarly, a father described a pattern of his child being put down by peers with direct degrading comments. These accounts show that denigration extended beyond direct insults to include criticism of children's abilities, self-expression, appearance and confidence in online spaces. The statements are given below:

> "After school, he usually plays Roblox. So, I became aware that my child had stopped playing Roblox […] his friend said that he was not good at playing." (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

> "She said his friend commented, 'What kind of voice is that? You shouldn't have recorded that.' Even though he didn't fully understand, he still felt disappointed when someone insulted his voice like that. So, he understood that the person was criticizing and belittling his video." (Informant 3, female, 25 years old, Terengganu).

> "He uploaded a video of himself speaking in English. His pronunciation wasn't very good […] His friends commented things like, 'Let me borrow some of that confidence,

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

did you even think properly before uploading?' […] some even downloaded the video and reposted it on their status…" (Informant 4, male, 41 years old, Terengganu).

In addition, the use and distribution of images to humiliate was also recognized as a form of denigration. "From what they told us, their children's photos were taken and turned into memes or stickers and then shared in group chats and became a topic of mockery among peers. Such experiences indicate that online humiliation may extend to offline realms and influence children's peer relations. Parents' stories suggested that repeated mocking and exposure to public shame seemed to further shape a child's sense of self and behavior toward peers. Examples of the statements are shown below:

> "They used my child's picture and turned it into a meme, then shared it in the group. My daughter only found out from a friend […] the picture was mocked and ridiculed, even carried over into school." (Informant 6, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

> "My child was sleeping, and a friend took a picture of him […] Once they got his face, they immediately made stickers, and the image was used by other children to mock him […] he was ridiculed from online all the way to school." (Informant 8, male, 30 years old, Johor).

The findings thus suggest that denigration in cyberbullying is generally perpetrated through mocking statements, negative portrayals, degrading comments and the sharing of humiliating digital content such as status updates, memes, stickers and videos. However, parents' reports indicate that these experiences can also lead to disappointment, embarrassment, decreased self-confidence, and worries about how the child is viewed in the eyes of peers.

Another prominent form of cyberbullying identified was harassment. Parnets described situations in which hurtful comments or embarrassing incidents were repeatedly brought up through social media and online group interactions. The recurring nature of these behaviouts was an important feature distinguishing harassment from an isolated negative interaction. For example, one parent explained that an incident involving her child during a camping activity continued online when peers discussed and mocked the child through social media statuses and class group conversations. The statement is exemplified below:

> "But it didn't stop at the camping incident alone […] They posted statuses talking about it, and it was also discussed in the class group." (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

The same informant explained that her child continued to receive humiliating remarks from peers over a period of approximately two to three months. Another parent described repeated appearance-related comments on WhatsApp, including remarks that her child was "not pretty", while insulting language and name-calling were also reported. Although some children appeared to respond casually to these remarks, parents still viewed the repeated comments as hurtful and inappropriate. This illustrates how behaviours that may be normalised as joking among peers can nevertheless become harmful when they are repeatedly directed at the same child. The statement is exemplified below:

> "My child has a slight tonsil problem, so when sleeping, she snores […] There were also friends who mocked her, saying 'Eh, you sleep and snore too loudly,' and 'I'm

embarrassed to be friends with you,' things like that." (Informant 5, female, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).
"It wasn't something that happened just once, but it kept recurring over a certain period… maybe around two to three months." (Informant 5, male, 28 years old, Negeri Sembilan).

"Over the years, I've seen messages on her WhatsApp saying she's not pretty and things like that. It's quite normal, since they're her school friends—basically her close friends (BFFs)." (Informant 1, female, 32 years old, Kedah).

"So, she didn't really take it to heart. But I still read what the children were writing. They said things like, 'They said you're not pretty,' and she would reply, 'It's okay, never mind,' like that." (Informant 1, female, 32 years old, Kedah).

In addition, the same parent also described that insulting language such as calling the child stupid was also present in peer interactions. Although such words were initially perceived as something common among children, the informant still expressed concern and disapproval towards the use of such hurtful expressions. This indicates that repeated name-calling through digital communication may also be categorised as harassment. The statement is exemplified below:

"Things like calling someone 'stupid' are quite common among kids. But I still get upset—why say 'stupid'? You shouldn't say that. Why not say something nice instead? Can't you?" (Informant 1, female, 32 years old, Kedah).

The findings therefore indicate that harassment was reflected in repeated teasing, mocking, humiliating remarks, and verbal insults communicated through online platforms. Parents' accounts emphasised repetition and persistence as important characteristics of these experiences. Rather than describing the effects as statistically "significant", the interviews showed that repeated harassment could cause emotional discomfort and influence how children responded to their peers and online interactions.

Social exclusion was another form of cyberbullying identified through the parents' accounts. Several parents described situations in which their children were ignored in online group conversations, deliberately left without responses, or excluded from online activities involving peers. These experiences were often less direct than verbal insults but were still perceived by parents as harmful because they communicated rejection and reduced the child's sense of belonging within the peer group. The statements are exemplified below:

"Then we found a few chats in the WhatsApp group. It was like when he asked a question, his friends didn't reply, like they were ignoring him." (Informant 2, female, 28 years old, Kedah).

In addition, the findings indicate that social exclusion also extended beyond online interactions into collaborative activities, such as group or team settings. Some children were explicitly told that they were not good enough to participate, resulting in them being excluded from group play or team involvement. According to the parent's account, the experience contributed to the child becoming reluctant to make friends and affected his confidence in interacting with peers.

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

This demonstrates that cyberbullying may influence not only children's online participation but also their broader social behaviour and self-confidence. The statements are exemplified below:

"He said he was cyberbullied; he didn't want to make friends. They said my child couldn't play. They said he weakened the team in that game." (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

"Ohh… my child was cyberbullied, his friends said he wasn't good at playing. Then they told him, 'Don't join our team." (Informant 7, female, 28 years old, Johor).

Taken together, the interviews identified denigration, harassment, and social exclusion as three prominent patterns of cyberbullying experienced by the children. The findings show that these experiences were expressed through different forms, ranging from direct insults and repeated ridicule to public humiliation and exclusion from peer interactions. Parents' accounts further indicated emotional and behavioural responses among children, including disappointment, embarrassment, reduced self-confidence, social withdrawal, and reluctance to interact with peers.

In exploring further types of child cyberbullying, National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) also emphasised that the issue is increasingly complex and closely linked to children's patterns of digital engagement and parental supervision practices. The agency highlighted a notable rise in cyberbullying cases in Malaysia, as reflected in official reports by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), indicating that harmful online interactions are becoming more pervasive within children's daily lives. LPPKN further emphasised that inadequate supervision, excessive screen time, and permissive access to digital platforms may increase children's vulnerability to engaging in or becoming victims of cyberbullying. The statements are exemplified below:

> "Cyberbullying cases have shown a significant increase in Malaysia […] based on official reports by MCMC, there were 35 million complaints recorded as of October 2025. So, we can see that the content is related to violations of rules or digital platform regulations." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

> "From all the programmes that we have organised, we provide preventive measures on how parents can understand their children's behaviour […] ensuring appropriate screen time, not giving overly permissive freedom to children, or allowing them to browse […] inappropriate content that may lead them into issues like this and eventually into cyberbullying." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

While LPPKN does not specifically categorise cyberbullying into distinct types such as harassment or denigration, the agency highlighted concerning patterns of online interactions that reflect broader risks within the cyberbullying context. For instance, LPPKN reported cases where children were found engaging in seemingly affectionate or loving conversations with individuals, they believed to be within their age group, but who were in fact adults. Such interaction may indicate elements of manipulation or grooming, where the child is gradually influenced through emotional engagement in digital space. The statements are exemplified below:

> "Children can be quite naïve; they say they are using Facebook […] they think they are chatting with someone around their age, but actually it is someone much older […] they

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

> chat excessively and, before you know it, they run away from home […] they believe they are in a romantic relationship with someone they assume is their age, but when they leave the house […] they end up meeting an adult." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

Moreover, the findings suggest that children limited digital literacy may further heighten their vulnerability to cyberbullying-related behaviours. In particular, the misuse or misunderstanding of digital symbols such as emojis can serve as a subtle yet harmful form of online communication that may insult, provoke, or emotionally disturb others. The statements are exemplified below:

> "So, children also need to understand what emojis actually mean. Sometimes the sender may claim it is from an adult outside […] So to me, any bullying using emojis that are not appropriate—those that can disturb, insult, or threaten others—is indeed wrong." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

This indicates that even seemingly minor forms of digital expression may carry harmful meanings, reinforcing that cyberbullying can manifest in nuanced and indirect ways. Furthermore, to understand the types and risks of cyberbullying, LPPKN also highlighted the importance of knowledge transfer and early intervention through collaborative efforts between parents, children, and relevant agencies. Specifically, the agency stressed that parental participation in workshops alone is insufficient if the knowledge is not extended to children. The statements are exemplified below:

> "If parents attend workshops, they should ensure that children are also given access to this information. Because if parents go to workshops but do not create space for the children to learn, the children will not gain any input. So, in more serious cases, parents are advised to involve authorities, schools, or LPPKN for action. Sometimes, this also involves counselling." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

This suggests that effective prevention requires a more inclusive approach, where both parents and children are actively engaged in acquiring digital awareness and coping strategies. It also reflects the role of formal institutions such as schools, LPPKN, and authorities in addressing more severe cases, particularly through structured interventions such as counselling.

At the same time, the findings reveal the emotional burden experienced by parents when dealing with cyberbullying incidents involving their children. Parents were found to experience significant stress and psychological strain, highlighting the need for external support systems. The statements are exemplified below:

> "Yes, it may be expressions from parents themselves who feel very stressed in such situations, which is part of survival. Not only through activities provided by JKM, but counselling services are also offered where parents can go and get support. Likewise, children also need to be guided and given ongoing counselling support." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

LPPKN also emphasised the importance of adopting a non-judgemental and supportive approach when handling cyberbullying cases, particularly in encouraging children to express their experiences openly. At the same time, parents are advised to document digital evidence carefully for reporting and intervention purposes. The statements are exemplified below:

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

> "We don't want them to be labelled or judged, and we should give them space to share their feelings and the situations they are experiencing. That is very important. One of the key steps is that digital evidence, including messages, images, or videos, should be saved for reference and further reporting. What I see is that sometimes, as parents, it is difficult to keep all this information, so when making a report later, it becomes incomplete." (LPPKN, Kuala Lumpur).

The findings from relevant agency highlights two critical aspects in managing cyberbullying cases which are emotional support and procedural preparedness. Creating a safe space for children to share their experiences helps prevent further psychological harm, while systematic documentation of digital evidence ensures that appropriate actions can be taken by relevant authorities.

Discussion

This section presents the discussion of the findings on research objectives one of this study. The findings revealed that denigration was the main types of cyberbullying that were experienced by children. The findings of the study show that denigration, which is the act of tarnishing the image or dignity of the victim, often occurs through mockery, sarcasm, and negative portrayals on digital platforms such as social media (TikTok) and messaging applications (WhatsApp). Informants stated that their children are often the targets of insulting comments and criticism of the victim's abilities that aim to damage the victim's reputation in front of their peers.

This is in line with the classification presented by Bauman (2015), who asserts that denigration is one of the most common types of cyberbullying. According to him, denigration involves sending or sharing untrue, cruel, or insulting information about someone to damage their reputation and friendship. The consistency between the findings of this study and Bauman proves that despite the rapid development of technology, the pattern of aggressive online behaviour remains centered on efforts to publicly humiliate the victim.

Apart from text, the study also revealed that denigration is now evolving through digital content. The use of voice recordings, videos, memes, and modified stickers has been found to be an instrument to humiliate the victim. The spread of this visual content in WhatsApp groups or social media statuses makes the insult more viral and difficult to delete. Therefore, this study found important information where the effects of denigration are not limited to the digital space alone, but also spill over into the physical environment, especially at school. Children who are victims of online denigration often face face-to-face ridicule when other friends also see the content that is spread.

This phenomenon is in line with the study of Hinduja and Patchin (2010) which states that the experience of cyberbullying often has a continuity between the online and offline worlds. When a child's dignity is tarnished digitally, it directly affects their social status and emotional well-being in everyday interactions at school.

Apart from denigration, the study also identified harassment as a significant form of cyberbullying in children. While denigration focuses more on efforts to tarnish the victim's

image, harassment is detected through a pattern of aggressive behaviour that occurs repeatedly and continuously over a period. Based on the sharing of informants, this harassment is often manifested through sending offensive messages, frequent sarcasm, and constant insults through messaging applications and social media.
This finding is in line with the definition put forward by Bauman (2015) which states that harassment in cyberspace involves sending abusive, insulting, or threatening messages repeatedly to a specific individual. Bauman (2015) also emphasises that this element of repetition is the dividing line between normal conflict and cyberbullying. This is because there is a deliberate continuous attack that is carried out to cause anger, fear, and deep emotional distress to the victim.

Through this study, it shows how an issue such as mockery of physical or personal experiences often begins as a peer joke that then turns into harassment when it is magnified and repeated openly in chat groups. Although there is a tendency among children to normalise abusive language or negative nicknames as part of friendship culture, the parents in this study see it as a form of inappropriate harassment.

The consistent repetition of the victim's weaknesses on digital platforms makes it difficult for the victim to escape because harassment can occur at any time regardless of physical location. This further reinforces Bauman's (2015) argument that the prolonged nature of cyberbullying increases insecurity among children, thus affecting their emotional well-being and social development in the long term.

Completing the discussion on forms of cyberbullying, research also identifies social exclusion as a significant form of relationship manipulation. In contrast to denigration and harassment, which often involve overt verbal attacks, social exclusion is more passive but highly impactful as it involves the deliberate act of marginalising children from group interactions and digital activities.

This exclusion takes many forms, from ignoring messages, known as *'palau'* among Malaysian teenagers to being explicitly banned from joining online video game teams. For example, informants stated that their children were often denied the right to join chat groups or gaming teams on the grounds of incompetence or perceived weakness of the team. This is in line with Bauman (2015)'s view that social exclusion is one of the cyberbullying tactics that aims to remove the victim from the online community. According to Bauman (2015), the act of excluding someone from a peer group digitally is a serious form of relational aggression. He emphasised that the denial of the right to belong to a group can have a greater psychological impact than direct ridicule, because it touches on the basic human need to be accepted by peers. At the same time, the effects of this exclusion, as reported by parents, lead to feelings of isolation, decreased self-confidence, and a reluctance to continue socialising digitally. Consistent with Bauman's (2015) argument, this repeated act of exclusion creates a toxic digital environment, where children feel unsafe and unappreciated, thus affecting their mental well-being in the long term.

Although Bauman (2015) outlined six main forms of cyberbullying; harassment, flaming, trickery, stalking, denigration, masquerading, and social exclusion, this study only identified three forms that were most evident in the context of parents' experiences in Malaysia. The difference in the number of categories can be seen from several perspectives. First, there is a

limitation in the number of informants, namely only 8 people involved in this study, which may affect the diversity of forms of cyberbullying reported. However, in a qualitative perspective, the purpose is not to include all categories statistically, but to delve deeper into the phenomenon that is truly felt by the study subjects.
Secondly, this finding also reflects the current trend of cyberbullying among children in Malaysia, where the boundaries between these types of bullying often overlap. Based on the sharing of informants, most incidents start from mild teasing (in line with denigration) which then progressively develop into repeated harassment and finally end with exclusion. The trend where cyberbullying starts with verbal before moving on to other forms is also supported by recent literature. For example, a study by Samsudin et al. (2023) in the Malaysian context found that hurtful comments or verbal insults were the most experienced actions (51.7%) before it degenerated into more complex forms of harassment. At the same time, a study from the Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Science (2025) also showed an increasing trend of cyberbullying that started in school and continued social media platforms. Thus, it shows that traditional teasing is now migrating to the digital space in a more systematic form. This phenomenon suggests that for children in Malaysia, categories such as trickery or masquerading may not yet be dominant compared to direct attacks on their dignity and social status. Therefore, the three forms found in this study are seen as the core of the cyberbullying cycle that most effects children's emotional well-being today.

Findings on this cyberbullying trend provide a broader picture when examined through the lens of Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2008). According to this theory, children's psychological well-being depends on the fulfillment of three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and connection. In the context of this study, acts of denigration and harassment directly violate children's competence needs when they are labeled as weak or not good at digital space. More critically, forms of social exclusion or digital isolation are found to severe the foundation of relationships. When children are marginalised by WhatsApp groups or video game teams, they lose a sense of belonging in their peer community. This failure to fulfill the basic needs outlined by Deci and Ryan explains why the emotional impact experienced by the informant children is so profound, given that their social needs have been deliberately blocked by the perpetrator.

Conclusion

This study shows that cyberbullying in Malaysia is moving toward more systematic forms, often starting in school and continuing through digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Roblox. While this research provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of eight families, it also opens opportunities for future studies to examine larger and more diverse samples across rural and urban settings.

The digital world offers many benefits, but for children, it has also become a space where hidden risks can emerge. As the findings suggest, protecting children requires more than technical solutions. It requires the involvement of parents, teachers, relevant authorities, and policymakers in recognising cyberbullying patterns at an early stage. Understanding that seemingly simple online behaviours, such as humiliating stickers, repeated mocking messages, or intentional exclusion from online interactions, may also represent harmful forms of cyberbullying can help adults respond more appropriately and protect children’s emotional well-being.

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

The findings further highlight the need for a structured digital parenting framework that can guide parents in responding to cyberbullying incidents more effectively. Such a framework should include several important elements, including cyberbullying awareness, parent-child communication, digital monitoring, guidance on responsible online behaviour, appropriate reporting procedures, and stronger coordination between parents, schools, and relevant authorities. By providing clearer guidance in these areas, the framework may help parents identify cyberbullying earlier, communicate more effectively with their children, monitor online activities appropriately, and determine when external assistance is required.

Despite the depth of the findings, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Methodological Approach:** This study relied exclusively on a qualitative design. While this captured a rich and nuanced understanding of parental experiences, the findings are descriptive and cannot be used to establish statistical trends for the entire Malaysian population.

- **Participant Demographics:** The participant pool was predominantly composed of mothers. Due to work commitments as primary breadwinners, fathers were less available for interviews. Consequently, while the study provides a deep understanding of maternal strategies, the paternal perspective remains underrepresented.

- **Topic Sensitivity:** Cyberbullying carries a social stigma. Many parents felt a sense of embarrassment or shame, which created hurdles in recruitment and may have influenced the depth of disclosure during interviews.

To address the growing complexity of this issue, the following recommendations are proposed:

Integration of Cyberbullying Education into the National Curriculum:

A vital long-term strategy is the formal integration of digital citizenship into the Malaysian school syllabus. Malaysia should look toward international benchmarks, such as Australia's Safety Commissioner Framework or Finland's "New Literacies" program, which treat digital ethics as a fundamental skill equivalent to reading and writing. In the Malaysian context, this could be achieved by updating Civic or Moral Education to include "Digital Empathy," teaching the real-world consequences of online actions, and strengthening ICT or Asas Sains Komputer (ASK) subjects to cover the legal aspects of digital footprints and privacy settings.

Future Research Directions:

To gain a more holistic view, future studies should move toward a mixed-method approach. Integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews would allow for the collection of large-scale data to measure trends across different regions. Additionally, future research should aim for a more balanced gender distribution among participants and perhaps employ longer engagement periods to build the trust necessary to discuss such sensitive family challenges.

Ultimately, cyberbullying is not an issue that parents can manage alone. As technology continues to advance, educational and support systems must move beyond reactive responses.

International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling
IJEPC
EISSN : 0128-164X
Volume 11 Issue 64 (September 2026) PP. 1439-1455

A more coordinated approach, supported by a structured digital parenting framework that integrates awareness, communication, monitoring, reporting mechanisms, and institutional cooperation, may provide parents with clearer guidance when responding to cyberbullying incidents. By fostering a proactive culture of digital respect through the school system, family support, and national policy, children can be better equipped with the awareness and emotional skills needed to navigate the digital environment safely and responsibly.

Acknowledgements: The authors acknowledge the support of Universiti Teknologi MARA and funding from Ministry of Higher Education under Sponsorship File Number: FRGS/1/2024/SS10/UITM/03/2 (RMI File Number: 600-RMC/FRGS 5/3 (059/2024); Project Code: 286419240007).

Funding Statement: This study was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) (Grant No. FRGS/1/2024/SS10/UITM/03/2; RMI File No. 600-RMC/FRGS 5/3 (059/2024); Project Code: 286419240007). Administrative support was provided by Universiti Teknologi MARA. The funder had no involvement in the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, or publication decisions.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling (IJEPC).

Ethics Statement: The interview questions underwent expert and professional review through the approval process conducted by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at both the university and faculty levels of Universiti Teknologi MARA. The review involved academics and professionals with expertise in child cyberbullying, parental coping strategies, qualitative research, and ethical research practices. Their evaluation focused on the clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and cultural appropriateness of the interview questions to ensure alignment with the research objectives and the Malaysian sociocultural context. This process enhanced the validity and credibility of the research instrument by ensuring that the questions were ethically appropriate and capable of effectively addressing the core issues explored in the study.

Author Contribution Statement: This manuscript was developed as part of Nurul Shafiza Izzuana Mohd Zahari's Master by Research and represents a collaborative effort between the master's candidate and the supervisory team. Nurul Shafiza Izzuana Mohd Zahari conducted the research, including data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript drafting. Dr. Siti Nur Fathanah Abd Hamid, the main supervisor, contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript. Dr. Suhaimi, the co-supervisor, provided methodological guidance, scholarly input, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

References

Agastya, A. S. L., Putri, A. K., & Ma'rufah, N. (2019). Cyberbullying and its impact on mental health among college students. *Journal of Health and Behavioral Science, 1*(3), 164–175.

Baturay, M. H., & Toker, S. (2019). Internet addiction among college students: Some causes and effects. *Education and Information Technologies, 24*(5), 2863–2885. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-09956-1

Bauman, S. (2015). Types of Cyberbullying. *Cyberbullying: What Counselors Need to Know*, 53–58. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119221685.ch4

Burns, M., Bally, J., Burles, M., Holtslander, L., & Peacock, S. (2022). Constructivist Grounded Theory or Interpretive Phenomenology? Methodological Choices Within Specific Study Contexts. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221077758

Charmaraman, L., Hodes, J. S., & Richer, A. M. (2020). Young adolescent social media use, and its association with social isolation and psychological well-being. *Journal of Media Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000262

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne, 49*(1), 14–23. https://doi.org/10.1037/0708-5591.49.1.14

Dehue, F., Bolman, C., & Völlink, T. (2008). Cyberbullying: Youngsters' experiences and parental perception. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 11*(2), 217–223. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.0008

Klonick, K. (2016). Re-shaming the debate: Social norms, shame, and regulation in an internet age. *Maryland Law Review, 75*(4), 1029–1066. https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mlr/vol75/iss4/3.

Larson, S. (2024, September 5). *Most popular apps | Downloads, Users & Stats 2024*. Priori Data. https://prioridata.com/data/most-popular-apps/

Michael, A. S., Sani, M. N. M., & Sani, M. S. M. (2021). The impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of adolescents: A systematic review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11*(12).

Olweus, D. (1988). *Bully/victim problems among schoolchildren: Basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2023). *Cyberbullying identification, prevention, and response*. Cyberbullying Research Center.

Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 11(2), 419–428. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i2/12938

Samsudin, E. Z., Yaacob, S. S., Wee, C. X., Ruzlin, A. N. M., Azzani, M., Jamil, A. T., Muzaini, K., Ibrahim, K., Suddin, L. S., Selamat, M. I., Saman, M. S. A., Abdullah, N. N., Ismail, N., Yasin, S. M., Azhar, Z. I., Ismail, Z., Isa, M. R., & Mohamad, M. (2023). Prevalence of cyberbullying victimisation and its association with family dysfunction, health behaviour and psychological distress among young adults in urban Selangor, Malaysia: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*, *13*(11), e072801. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2023-072801

Saruddin, M. Z., Azman, A. Z. F., Zulkefli, N. A. M., & Isa, M. R. (2025). *Prevalence of cyberbullying and its associated factors among high school students in Klang District*

Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences, 21*(3), 220–231. https://doi.org/10.47836/mjmhs.21.3.

Siraj, S., Abd Rozan, M. Z., & Salam, S. N. A. (2015). Digital world and its impact on the youth: A review of globalization and connectivity. *Journal of Information Systems Research and Innovation (JISRI), 9*(1), 1–10.

Tsuno, K., Kawakami, N., Inoue, A., & Abe, K. (2005). Measuring social exclusion and its impact on mental health: A population-based study. *Social Science & Medicine, 61*(6), 1345–1351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.01.018