CYBERBULLYING OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The study examines the growing issue of cyberbullying, which is intertwined with traditional bullying due to technological advancements. It focuses on understanding how female university students in Pakistan perceive, experience, and respond to cyberbullying and its impact on their academic achievements. The research employs a theoretical framework based on symbolic interactionism and uses a quantitative approach through a survey questionnaire for broad insights. The study involves 200 participants selected conveniently via an online survey from four major Pakistani universities. Data analysis is done using Linear Regression, revealing that cyberbullying experience affects perception and academic performance. Furthermore, individuals' responses to cyberbullying are linked to their awareness of the issue. This research collectively provides valuable insights into how female university students in Pakistan navigate cyberbullying.

Keywords
Cyberbullying, Perception, Experience, Awareness, Technology, Social media.

Introduction:

The internet has become a necessity and a significant aspect of human life (Kemp, 2018). However, alongside its benefits, there are also drawbacks, such as cyberbullying. This form of harassment is particularly prevalent on social media platforms, where individuals can experience various forms of victimization (Barlett, Gentile & Chew, 2016). Cyberbullying is defined as intentionally violating someone's online privacy to inflict physical and psychological harm. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is not limited by time or space, and it can occur repeatedly throughout a person's life (Kowalski RM, 2013). Furthermore, traditional bullying, a persistent issue over centuries, has extended its reach into cyberspace through the emergence of cyberbullying (Kowalski, 2014). While cyberbullying shares similarities with traditional bullying in terms of aggressive behaviour, it uniquely compromises a person's integrity through stalking, threats, and direct or indirect harm (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This digital form of bullying is facilitated by advancements in technology, creating a virtual environment for such negative actions.Statistics by Todorov (2022) showcase the prevalence of online bullying. Around 10% of Australian adults and a staggering 40% in the United States admit to experiencing online bullying. A significant 75% of adults in the United States report incidents of cyberbullying. Alarming figures indicate that one in three children across 30 nations has fallen victim to internet bullying. In Canada, within the past five years, one in five internet users aged 15 to 29 have faced cyberbullying or cyberstalking. Furthermore, insights into cyberbullying statistics on various social media platforms among school students indicate distressing rates. Instagram accounts for 42% of reported cyberbullying incidents, followed by Facebook at 37%. Snapchat and WhatsApp have rates of 31% and 12% respectively, while YouTube and Twitter stand at 10% and 9%. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to virtual interactions altered how people engage with one another. This transition to online environments extended to work and education, increasing internet activities and consequently, the susceptibility of individuals to cyberbullying and cybercrimes. With the pandemic, online presence surged, posing new academic challenges, especially for the youth (Jain et al. 2020).

A data report by Data reportal (2022) reveals that Pakistan has 82.90 million internet users. Among these, Facebook users constitute 43.55 million, Instagram boasts 13.75 million users, YouTube has a user base of 71.70 million, and Tiktok has 18.26 million users. Additionally, LinkedIn records 7.60 million users, and Snapchat is used by 18.80 million individuals in Pakistan. However, the issue of cyberbullying remains a global concern. According to the National Crime Prevention Council (2011), cyberbullying encompasses various online activities, including spreading hurtful messages, threats, abusive content, images, and blackmailing, along with hacking into accounts for personal information, invasion of privacy, and circulating degrading images with the intention of causing emotional torment. The scope of cyberbullying's nature in Pakistan remains to be fully understood. Notably, 17.9% of Pakistan's population falls within the 5 to 12 age group, while 10% is aged between 13 to 17. Additionally, those aged 18 to 24 constitute 13.0% of the population, and the 25 to 34 age group comprises 16.3% (Datareportal, 2022). Pakistan ranks among the top 25 countries where approximately one in four students has encountered cyberbullying at least once. This issue is more pronounced among female students, warranting education institutions and government intervention to raise awareness and equip students with tools to respond to cyberbullying (Bullying in Pakistan, 2018).

In Pakistani society, females are disproportionately affected by cyber harassment, blackmail, and threats. Cyberbullying also affects higher education institutions (Shahid, 2014). A study by Mirza et al. (2020) found that 58.7% of students experienced cyberbullying in various forms. Another comparative study by Imran (2014) highlighted that cyberbullying is more prevalent in Pakistan compared to Sweden. The study revealed that Pakistani male students employ different tactics of cyberbullying, particularly against women, often resorting to public embarrassment. Moreover, the responses of Swedish and Pakistani students after being bullied differed, with Swedish students demonstrating more effective ways to address the issue. Conversely, Pakistani students tended to ignore or plead with bullies to stop, showcasing a lack of awareness about how to respond.

Consequently, understanding cyberbullying's occurrence among young female university students in Pakistan is paramount. The present study aims to delve into the experiences of cyberbullying, the responses taken by victims, and the resulting impact on academic performance. Through this research, the goal is to assess the awareness of cyberbullying among female university students in Pakistan and their encounters with online bullying during their academic tenure.

Problem Statement

The surge of social media has yielded consequences like privacy breaches, security risks, and cyberbullying. This has created fresh challenges for students and youths. In Pakistan, female students encounter more cyberbullying than males (Magsi, Sahito & Magsi, 2016). Cyberbullying is growing among university students, particularly among females who often hesitate to report due to societal concerns. Haider's findings (2020) reveal that Pakistani women, facing cyberbullying due to expressing opinions, see a 48% incidence rate. Shockingly, only 28% of victims report these incidents, fearing more embarrassment. Despite its prevalence, cyberbullying lacks sufficient investigative attention and necessitates heightened awareness.

Hypotheses

1. The perception of female university students is affected by the experience of cyberbullying.
2. The academic performance of female university students in Pakistan is affected by cyberbullying.
3. The response to incidents of cyberbullying is affected by the awareness among female university students in Pakistan.

Literature Review

According to the Oxford dictionary, "bullying" involves seeking to damage, threaten, or coerce others. This historical issue persists among students across educational levels and workplaces worldwide. In the era of 1970s, psychologist Dan Olweus conducted pioneering research on bullying, initially focusing on direct forms

like
verbal and physical aggression. Early perceptions often limited bullying to boys, but later studies, such as Feshbach's (1969) work on indirect aggression, revealed it as a common concern for both boys and girls (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988).

Bullying manifests in various types, including direct bullying encompassing physical acts (e.g., hitting, kicking) and verbal acts (e.g., hurtful comments, teasing). Such behaviours involve intention, power imbalances, and repetition (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Bullying, a persistent issue particularly within educational environments, stems from power imbalances between peers and adversely affects victims, the learning process, and mental health, especially among children and adolescents (Rech et al., 2013). A study by De Oliveira et al. (2016) conducted in Brazil revealed that one in five students reported engaging in bullying within their peers. Most bullies were from higher grades, dealing with mental distress linked to family circumstances and superiority complexes. The study indicated mutual mental distress among both victims and aggressors. The severity of bullying should not be underestimated, as it can lead to verbal threats, suicide, and identity harm. Bullying can escalate, resulting in isolation, friendship loss, emotional turmoil, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and other challenges (Lim et al., 2015).

The nature of discomfort tied to bullying incidents is influenced by the specific nature of the incident rather than its form. Notably, when significant gender disparities are present, females tend to report more discomfort than males across all subscales (Bauman & Newman, 2013).

Furthermore, Torres et al. (2020) investigated the impact of various bullying forms on academic success. They discovered that a composite measure of bullying victimization influences a student's academic performance, with social bullying victimization playing a predominant role across various model assumptions.

Examining broader societal factors, Li et al. (2021) identified key reasons behind bullying, including inadequate anti-bullying education, ineffective classroom and dormitory management, and instructors' failure to identify and address bullying. Bullying was found to be more prevalent among students with certain characteristics, such as physical appearance or underachievement. Often, victims received little support from parents or instructors, leading to poor psychosocial well-being, social difficulties, and academic performance. However, it's important to note that bullying can inflict psychological, physical, educational, and social harm on the victim.

Cyberbullying

The surge in youth engagement with social media has fostered global communication channels. This has led the younger generation to seamlessly integrate new technologies into various aspects of their daily routines (Gerson & Rappaport, 2011). However, this extensive assimilation of technology has ushered in a new form of bullying, spurred by the widespread use of smartphones, gadgets, and internet access. Consequently, the constant availability and easy accessibility of these platforms amplify the potential for adverse outcomes among teenagers and young adults (Strom et al., 2012).

The prefix "cyber" emerged in tandem with technology, transposing the concept of "traditional bullying" (encompassing direct and indirect aggressive behaviours) into the realm of cyberspace. Cyberbullying, at its core, involves employing technology to communicate hurtfully or negatively with individuals or groups. A conspicuous aspect is the concealing of cyberbullies' true identities, a strategy assumed to amplify the inflicted harm on victims (Dilmaç et al., 2010). Additionally, David-Ferdon and Hertz (2009) characterize cyberbullying as "electronic aggression," encompassing the dissemination of damaging information through the internet to engage in cyber harassment.

Cyberbullying among university students and reasons

In educational settings, cyberbullying has become a significant global concern. A recent study by Paek et al. (2022) concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic posed major challenges, particularly for the youth, as their social lives and education transitioned to the virtual realm. During the pandemic, heightened screen time, lack of in-person interaction, and continuous isolation rendered youth exceptionally vulnerable to cyberbullying. Various studies underscore the far-reaching impact of cyberbullying on mental health,

academic performance, and more. Fabito et al. (2018) found that cyberbullying and mobile game addiction adversely affect students' mental health and grades. Furthermore, cyberbullying prevalence among college students is a growing concern. However, the actions and participants involved in cyberbullying circumstances among college females remain inadequately understood (Selkie et al., 2016).

While cyberbullying's prevalence varies, gender and age play pivotal roles. For instance, De Oliveira et al. (2016) reported that one in five students practiced bullying among their peers, predominantly in higher grades, often driven by mental distress and a sense of superiority. In contrast, some studies found no link between gender and cyberbullying, focusing instead on language strategies used by perpetrators (Rafi, 2019). Notably, victims often receive inadequate support from parents and instructors, exacerbating their psychosocial well-being and academic performance (Hoff et al., 2009). Nevertheless, a comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying remains essential for effective intervention and prevention. Thornberg & Delby (2019) underscore the need to comprehend bullying among students more deeply, advocating for inclusive student consultation programs to refine bullying prevention strategies in educational institutions. As technology continues to evolve, proactive measures are crucial to safeguarding the well-being and academic success of the youth.

Social Media and Cyberbullying
The surging popularity of social media platforms has brought about significant changes in various aspects of our lives. In the digital landscape of communication, platforms like Twitter serve as diaries where individuals frequently share their feelings and life updates, while Facebook facilitates connections and interactions among friends, family, and new acquaintances (Osterrieder, 2013). However, this widespread adoption of online technology has also led to the emergence of cyberbullying, as indicated by Cook's findings (2020), with a cyberbullying rate of 19.2% observed on social media websites and applications. Instagram emerges as a prominent platform for cyberbullying, affecting 42% of young individuals, followed by Facebook at 37%, Snapchat at 31%, and YouTube at 10% (Grigonis, 2017).
In Pakistan, internet usage is on the rise, with a significant portion having active social media accounts. Unfortunately, this growth also coincides with an alarming rate of online harassment, affecting around 40% of females, of which only 28% report the harassment (Haider, 2020). Similarly, Abaido (2020) highlighted the prevalence of cyberbullying among university students in the UAE, with 91% confirming its occurrence, particularly on platforms like Instagram (55%) and Facebook (38%). The pervasive influence of information communication technologies (ICT) is evident, with nearly 20% of students being targets of cyberbullying in the past year (Faucher, 2012). While technology's integration into students' lives can yield positive outcomes, it can also result in negative consequences. Negative impacts may manifest as anti-social behavior, escalating in severity when public exposure spirals out of control, leading to detrimental outcomes like helplessness (Christian Elledge et al., 2013). Hazlyna et al.'s findings (2021) indicate that female students, due to their greater social media usage, are more susceptible to cyberbullying on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The implications of cyberbullying are significant, with both victims and perpetrators experiencing adverse effects on subjective well-being (Navarro, Ruiz-Oliva, et al., 2015). Hinduja & Patchin (2019) conducted an online survey revealing that 30% of participants reported being cyberbullied more than twice a month, with various platforms being exploited for these activities. The frequency and extent of cyberbullying actions are linked to online engagement levels (Savoldi and Ferraz de Abreu, 2016). Both bullies and victims tend to be heavy internet users, with social networking sites like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat being commonly employed (Savoldi and Ferraz de Abreu, 2016). Moreover, the study by Qaisar et al. (2022) conducted in Pakistan highlighted the divisive impact of political content on social media, leading to cyberbullying among supporters of different political parties. This aggression often takes the form of offensive language, misleading facts, impersonation, and manipulated images, with male users facing more offensive language due to their wider friendship circles compared to female users.

In summary, the pervasive use of social media platforms has brought about both positive and negative consequences, including the troubling rise of cyberbullying across various demographics and contexts.

Effects of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying victimization among undergraduate college students has been associated with a range of negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, low self-esteem, interpersonal conflicts, social tensions, and academic underperformance (Peled, 2019). Ybarra et al. (2007) have further noted that the severity of online harassment has been linked to increased behavioural and psychological disorders, indicating a potential connection between cyberbullying and broader mental health issues. In this context, students who engage in online harassment often grapple with behavioural and mental challenges concurrently, suggesting that internet harassment might be indicative of underlying psychological concerns.

Conversely, cyberbullying victimization has shown a notable impact on victims' mental well-being. Suicidal ideation, planning, and attempts have been found to be significantly higher among cyberbullying victims. Victims primarily cope by confiding in someone and avoiding interactions with friends and peers. Such effects are relatively gender-neutral (Schenk et al., 2012). Maternal attachment anxiety has also emerged as a factor influencing cyberbullying perpetration and victimization, with victims displaying higher levels of despair and loneliness, and cyberbully offenders reporting lower self-esteem and increased maternal attachment anxiety (Varghese et al., 2017).

Further exploration into the psychological aspects of cyberbullying reveals significant relationships with social factors. Navarro, Yubero, et al. (2015) discovered that a lack of intimate friendships and social support is critical in the context of both online and traditional bullying. Likewise, Navarro et al. (2012) identified predictors of cyber-victimization, including social anxiety, interpersonal issues, and a deficit in social skills. Bauman, Toomey, et al. (2013) explored the connection between bullying, depression, and suicide attempts, highlighting gender-specific differences in how depression moderates these relationships.

Depression, suicidal ideation, and the perpetrators' social, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds have been reported in subjects of cyberbullying (Ademiluyi et al., 2022). In light of this Al Qudah et al. (2020) have proposed that psychological loneliness and age are predictors of cyberbullying, with psychological loneliness emerging as the strongest predictor. This insight enhances our comprehension of the psychological aspects of cyberbullying and underscores the importance of understanding its motives beyond its negative consequences.

Across gender lines, self-esteem levels and well-being tend to be lower among girls compared to boys, with boys often reporting higher frequencies of bullying victimization (Romero-Reignier, 2022). An Australian study by Islam et al. (2022) compared factors associated with suicide risk and self-harm between victims of traditional bullying and cyberbullying aged 14 to 17 years. Their findings revealed higher rates of traditional bullying (25.6%) compared to cyberbullying (12%), with higher rates of suicidality and self-harm among the latter group. Girls were more susceptible to suicide risk and self-harm. Parental distress, mental disorders, sexual activities, and eating disorders were correlated with increased risk among victims.

In Egypt, Abdulmoez et al. (2022) found that cyber-violence against women is on the rise, with a majority of adult female respondents reporting experiences of cyber harassment, particularly on social media platforms. The increase in cyber-violence underscores the urgency to address this issue comprehensively.

Awareness of Cyberbullying

Aune (2009) conducted a study on cyberbullying which revealed that a higher proportion of females experience cyberbullying compared to males. The findings indicated that 38% of females faced instances of cyberbullying, whereas the figure was 26% for males. Furthermore, college students' perceptions of the prevalence and severity of cyberbullying were examined in a study conducted in 2011. The study involved 18 female undergraduates participating in three focus groups, each lasting around 75 minutes. The participants did not perceive cyberbullying as a significant concern presently, though they believed it might become more widespread among college students in the future. Despite awareness of the term "cyberbullying," many participants struggled to define it or provide examples. Moreover, a lack of knowledge about available resources for cyberbullying victims was evident among the majority of participants (Brewer et al., 2012).

Similarly, Kalender et al. (2019) discovered that students subjected to cyberbullying frequently respond by informing their parents, friends, or school teachers. Their common rationale was having no better alternative and a desire to share such experiences with close acquaintances. Additionally, when witnessing cyberbullying, students often intervened by attempting to halt the behaviours, aiding the victim, and notifying individuals capable of offering assistance.

The study by Sriati et al. (2022), conducted among Indonesian university students, demonstrated that self-control was prevalent in 77.65% of students, with 22.08% being victims and 3.04% acting as perpetrators. The study concluded that a higher level of self-control among students could potentially reduce incidents of both victimization and perpetration of cyberbullying.

Chen & Zhu (2022) identified that victims of cyberbullying often preferred not to seek external help, opting to keep the issue to themselves. Nevertheless, the study highlighted the significant influence of self-compassion on coping with cyberbullying experiences.

Furthermore, individual characteristics such as personality traits and knowledge about cyberbullying were not correlated with cyberbullying behavior among undergraduate students. However, psychological factors such as internalizing behaviors, low self-esteem, and antisocial behavior were found to significantly impact students' attitudes toward cyberbullying (Shaikh et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying Laws and Acts in Pakistan

The Cybercrime Wing (CCW) operates under the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and is responsible for addressing cybercrimes according to the legal framework established by the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016. The enactment of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act in 2016 by the National Assembly aimed to comprehensively define various forms of online and electronic crimes, outline investigation procedures, actions, and decisions related to such offenses (National Cyber Security Policy, 2021). Section 21 of the Act stipulates that any breach of online privacy resulting in harm to reputation through electronic means shall be punishable by imprisonment of up to seven years, a fine that may extend to five million rupees, or both.

Pakistan's cybercrime legislation comprises three main laws:
a.   Electronic Transaction Ordinance (ETO) 2002
b.   Electronic/Cyber Crime Bill Ordinance 2007
c.   Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016

The ETO encompasses cybercrime regulations in Pakistan, covering topics such as the Digital Signature framework, evidentiary implications, recognition of electronic documents, certification providers for websites and digital signatures, electronic communications, attestation and notarization of certified copies, stamp duty, offenses, and jurisdiction. In 2007, the Electronic/Cyber Crime Bill Ordinance was enacted, addressing significant electronic offenses like data damage, electronic forgery, cyber terrorism, unauthorized access, cyberstalking, cyber-spamming/spoofing, and electronic fraud.

The PECA, passed in 2016, further elaborates on cybercrimes in Pakistan based on the provisions mentioned in the 2007 cybercrime bill. It primarily deals with offenses like Denial-of-Service (DOS) attacks, illegal access to data (hacking), cyberterrorism, electronic forgery, and electronic fraud. Additionally, the Prevention

of
Electronic Crime Act 2016 identifies specific crimes under the Act, as reported by Khan (2016). To ensure secure browsing, it is advisable not to trust free online content and configure browser privacy settings as per individual privacy preferences. Avoid providing personal information in exchange for free online offerings and steer clear of clicking links within emails or messages (Prevention of Electronic Crime Act, 2016).

In a recent development, the Government of Pakistan amended the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 on February 18, 2022, to categorize online defamation against authorities, including the judiciary and military, as a criminal offense. Perpetrators will be subject to legal penalties (Amnesty, 2022). Cyber harassment is recognized as a punishable offense in Pakistan; however, many individuals remain unaware of the associated regulations. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, enforces strict penalties for online bullying. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) oversees federal crimes at the national level, and the National Response Center for Cyber Crimes (NR3C), established by FIA, focuses on combating technology-based crimes in Pakistan. NR3C serves as an integral part of FIA's directive, dedicated solely to addressing cybercrimes. It receives online complaints related to cybercrimes and provides assistance accordingly, along with information on cybercrime prevention and safeguarding social media accounts (Mohsin, 2016).

Cyberbullying Policies at Universities
 To address the issues of cyberbullying and cyber harassment, it is imperative for universities to establish a comprehensive and transparent policy. Such a policy should not only provide assurance to victims of cyberbullying but also aid in their recovery from the associated trauma.
Research investigating the prevalence of cyberbullying among 282 students indicated a higher inclination towards reporting cyberbullying incidents when the university policy explicitly addressed the matter. This underscores the significance of universities taking proactive measures to address cyberbullying, as a failure to report such incidents can hinder the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying policies (Wozencroft et al., 2015).

In an effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment for enrolled students, Kanayama and Kurihara (2018) conducted a study that highlighted various anticipatory measures implemented by universities. The integration of courses such as cyber police and mobile phone law into the curriculum aimed to educate students about the laws concerning cyberbullying.
However, it has been noted by Cox and Raditch (2022) that many university cyberbullying policies lack clarity and do not explicitly address the issue. This was exemplified in a study examining Florida university policies pertaining to the reporting of cyberbullying incidents by faculty members.

To effectively foster cyber safety behavior within university settings, it is recommended that specific anti-cyberbullying policies be incorporated into the curriculum. Cilliers (2021) emphasizes the importance of raising awareness about laws against cyberbullying and integrating this awareness into the academic syllabus. Furthermore, Cassidy et al. (2017) proposes the implementation of research-based programs and workshops to educate students about the legal dimensions of cyberbullying. This proactive approach can contribute to a better understanding of the legal implications associated with online harassment.

Taking a collective approach, Faucher et al. (2020) suggest that open discussions about cyberbullying should be encouraged within classroom settings. Engaging students in these conversations can lead to the development of meaningful solutions and strategies for addressing cyberbullying effectively.

Theoretical framework
 The study is conceptually grounded in George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism theory (1863–1931), which focuses on the micro-level interactions between individuals. This theory explains how individuals construct their understanding of the world through their interactions with people, objects, events, and concepts. It emphasizes the role of meaning-making in shaping behavior and society, illustrating how social structures evolve through continuous interactions. Herbert Blumer expanded on Mead's theory by highlighting that

societal reality is constructed through the daily interactions where individuals convey emotions and meanings through various forms of communication, including verbal and nonverbal cues (Blumer, 1969). In the context of digital media, symbolic interactionism remains pertinent as it elucidates how social media platforms shape opinions and attitudes by facilitating interactions through symbols that convey meaning to participants.

Mead and Blumer's insights are particularly applicable to the study of cyberbullying, where interactions occur through digital platforms, lacking face-to-face engagement. In this context, meaning is derived through virtual discourse, aligning with the symbolic interactionist perspective. Furthermore, the theory underscores that individuals' online experiences are influenced by their past socialization, cultural background, and ethnicity, resulting in varied interpretations of online interactions. Symbolic interactionism theory also underscores the dynamic nature of online interactions, where responses are subject to diverse interpretations by individuals involved. Each respondent's unique background and experiences contribute to their distinct online encounters, reflecting the reciprocity of interpretation within interpersonal interactions. This theoretical framework aids in understanding the complexities of cyberbullying and the diverse ways in which individuals perceive and respond to such interactions in the digital realm.

Methodology

The study employs a deductive approach to test hypotheses, utilizing an existing theory to examine the concept. The research adopts a quantitative research method, utilizing a survey questionnaire for data collection. Data collection involves the distribution of an online Google survey link to targeted young female students within the selected population. The convenience sampling technique is used to select participants. The study focuses on female students from specific universities in Pakistan: Quaid e Azam University Islamabad, GCU Lahore, UMT Sialkot, and the University of Gujrat. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 26 and above, encompassing young females. The sample size comprises 200 participants to ensure representative results.

Data analysis is conducted using descriptive statistics in SPSS to interpret the findings in statistical terms. IBM SPSS version 26 is employed for all statistical calculations. Linear regression is utilized to examine the cause-and-effect relationships between the variables and test the hypotheses. Reliability of the questionnaire is assessed through Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS, with a value exceeding 0.6 considered indicative of a good scale. Based on the pilot study, Cronbach's alpha is calculated as 0.704, demonstrating reliability. For scale validity, correlation values of each question are examined in SPSS to identify significant levels below 0.5. Degrees of freedom are calculated using N-30=28, and critical values are compared using a values chart. The scale values are found to be significant (Sig.2tailed value 0.000), confirming validity. The survey comprises 31 questions to assess the impact of cyberbullying among female students in Pakistan. The questionnaire scale on cyberbullying is adapted from the REELISE CYBERBULLYING SURVEY and studies by Brochu (2017) and Molluzzo et al. (2012). The survey is conducted within a specific timeframe, from 22-03-2022 to 8-06-2022.

Results and Findings:

Hypothesis 1: The perception of female university students is affected by the experience of cyberbullying.

Table no. 1.1

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Experience[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Perception
b. All requested variables entered.

In order to check the perception of cyberbullying affected by the experience, here the independent variable is cyberbullying experience and the dependent variable is perception.

Table no 1.2

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.194[a]	.037	.033	1.306

a. Predictors: (Constant), Experience

 This table demonstrated the value of R is 0.194, the R square value is 0.037, and the Adjusted R square value is 0.033 whereas cyberbullying is predicted as constant.

Table no.1.3
ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	13.144	1	13.144	7.709	.006[b]
Residual	337.576	198	1.705		
Total	350.720	199			

a.   Dependent Variable: Perception
b.   Predictors: (Constant), Experience

In the above-shown table, the value of F-ratio ANOVA demonstrates the independent variable Experience and dependent variable Perception outcomes.

Table no.1.4 *Coefficients[a]*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.206	.138		30.411	.000
Experience	-.101	.036	-.194	-2.777	.006

a. Dependent Variable: Perception

The above coefficient table shows that the value of linear regression analysis indicates an impact but not too significant between dependent variable Perception and independent variable experience among young female university students. The coefficients beta value is negative -.194. Whereas the level of significance here is (n=200, constant= 0.000, p<0.006).
Therefore, H1 has been rejected.

Hypothesis 2:   The academic performance of female university students in Pakistan is affected by cyberbullying.

Table no. 2.1

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Variables Variables Model Entered Removed Method		
1	Experience[b]	. Enter

a.   Dependent Variable: Academic Performance
b.   All requested variables entered.

Based on linear regression statistical analysis the above table indicates the variables of this study. Here the independent variable is cyberbullying experience and the dependent variable is academic performance.

Table no. 2.2

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.405[a]	.164	.159	1.250

a. Predictors: (Constant), Experience

The table demonstrates that here the R-value (0.405) indicated that there is a significant effect between the dependent and independent variable, R Square value is 0.164, and the Adjusted R Square value is 0.159 whereas the cyberbullying experience is predicted as constant. Therefore, it indicates that the independent can influence the dependent variable.

Table no. 2.3
ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	60.539	1	60.539	38.750	.000[b]
Residual	309.336	198	1.562		
Total	369.875	199			

a.   Dependent Variable: Academic Performance
b.   Predictors: (Constant), Experience

In the above-shown table, the value of F-ratio ANOVA demonstrates the independent variable Experience and the dependent variable academic performance outcomes.

Table no. 2.4
Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	3.889	.132		29.372	.000
Experience	-.216	.035	-.405	-6.225	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Table no.2 shows that the value of linear regression analysis is which shows that there is a significant effect on the academic performance affected by cyberbullying experience among young female university students. The coefficients beta value is 0.405   Whereas the level of significance here is (n=200, constant= 0.000, p<0.000).
Therefore, the results are statistically significant.
Hence H2 has been proved.
Hypothesis 3: The response to incidents of cyberbullying is affected by the awareness among female university students in Pakistan.

Table no. 3.1
Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Awareness[b]	.	Enter

a.   Dependent Variable: Response
b.   All requested variables entered.

Based on linear regression statistical analysis the above table indicates the variables of this study. Here the independent variable is cyberbullying awareness and the dependent variable is the response to cyberbullying.

Table no. 3.2
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.607[a]	.368	.365	1.098

a. Predictors: (Constant), Awareness
The table demonstrates the R-value is 0.607 which predicts there is a statistically significant correlation while the value of R square is 0.368 and the adjusted R Square value is 0.365 which indicates the independent variables can influence 36.8% and
36.5% of the dependent variable.

Table no.3.3
ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	139.274	1	139.274	115.515	.000[b]
Residual	238.726	198	1.206		
Total	378.000	199			

a.   Dependent Variable: Response
b.   Predictors: (Constant), Awareness

In order to find out the effects of awareness on the response to cyberbullying, Here the independent variable is awareness and the dependent variable is Response. The table of ANOVA indicates that the current p-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.005 hence it predicts a statistically significant effect.

Table no. 3.4

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	1.392	.237		5.873	.000
Awareness	.632	.059	.607	10.748	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Response

Table no.3 shows that the value of linear regression analysis is which shows that there is a significant effect on the experiences caused by cyberbullying among young female university students. The coefficients beta value is 0.607. Whereas the level of significance here is (n=200, constant= 0.000, p<0.000). Both independent and dependent variables are statistically significant Therefore, H3 has been proved.

The linear regression analysis of experiences of cyberbullying and perception (see table 1) indicates that cyberbullying is experienced by most young female university students. Likewise, the linear regression analysis of academic performance and cyberbullying (see table 2) it is indicated that academic performance is significantly affected by cyberbullying among young female university students. Whereas the linear regression analysis of cyberbullying awareness and response to cyberbullying (see table 3) it is indicated that there is a significant effect of awareness on the response to cyberbullying among young female university students.

The results of the study suggest that the scholastic achievement and reactions of young female university students to cyberbullying undergo substantial influence from both their encounters with cyberbullying and their level of consciousness regarding this phenomenon. A regression-based statistical examination anticipates a discernible influence of personal experience on the interpretation of cyberbullying, while its impact on the actual incidence of cyberbullying appears to be less pronounced. The findings underscore that within the context of Pakistan, awareness pertaining to cyberbullying among female university students is not infrequent, and the existence of legal frameworks has facilitated the redressal of cyberbullying victims. However, it is imperative to address the deficiency in the reporting of cybercrimes at the national level through educational initiatives.

Discussion and Analysis

The research encompasses a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, wherein qualitative studies explore themes and connections related to cyberbullying, while the present study employs quantitative techniques for its findings. The impact of cyberbullying experiences on the perception of female university students is found to be unfavourable, not significantly substantial enough to warrant acceptance of the initial hypothesis. Notably, the nature of cyberbullying experiences varies individually, yielding results that indicate a lack of strong correlation between the two variables. Although a notable proportion of female students encountered instances of cyberbullying, such experiences do not significantly shape their perceptions. However, the study underscores a discernible correlation between cyberbullying experiences and the academic performance of female university students. Linear regression analysis reveals a noteworthy influence of cyberbullying experiences on academic performance, as these encounters contribute to mental distress that subsequently impacts attendance and academic engagement. Moreover, the research verifies that the response to cyberbullying is influenced by the level of awareness among female university students. The outcomes of linear regression analysis demonstrate a substantial correlation between awareness levels and cyberbullying experiences among young female students, thereby substantiating the associated hypothesis through statistical means. This study delves into an extensive exploration of cyberbullying experiences, perception, academic outcomes, awareness, and response strategies among young female university students. The findings are augmented with references to pertinent research studies.

Cyberbullying Experiences and Perception:
The study uncovers that a substantial 60.5% (n=121) of participants reported instances of cyberbullying, whereas 22% (n=44) remained unexposed. Comparison with Kang et al.'s (2021) study indicates variability in cyberbullying victimization rates. Notably, parallels with Brochu's (2017) research demonstrate congruence, showing 47.39% of participants experiencing cyberbullying. Distinctive prevalence rates on different social media platforms are unveiled, with Facebook being the primary conduit for cyberbullying (30%), followed by Instagram (25%). These statistics diverge from Brochu's (2017) study, in which Instagram and Twitter exhibited greater prevalence. Aligned with Abaido's (2020) study, Facebook (38%) and Instagram (55.5%) dominate as cyberbullying platforms in the UAE. Hazlyna et al.'s (2021) research mirrors these trends, suggesting that social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter serve as conduits for cyberbullying, predominantly affecting female students.

The study examines cyberbullying encounters and finds that a substantial number of participants (60.5%) have experienced cyberbullying. The majority define cyberbullying as recurrent online teasing. Additionally, participants commonly engage with social media for 3 to 4 hours daily, heightening their exposure to cyberbullying risks. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified online engagement due to the shift towards remote learning.

Cyberbullying Experience and Academic Performance:
A notable correlation emerges between cyberbullying experiences and the academic performance of female university students. Of significance, 22% (n=44) reported recurrent cyberbullying during their academic tenure. Respondents articulated difficulties concentrating on academic tasks post-cyberbullying incidents. Anxiety-induced absences from university, attributed to cyberbullying fears, were affirmed by 45% of participants. Moreover, participants acknowledged a tangible adverse effect of cyberbullying on academic performance, reinforcing Alotaibi's (2019) and Torres et al.'s (2020) findings on cyberbullying's detrimental academic repercussions.

The study establishes a negative correlation between cyberbullying experiences and academic performance. Participants who were cyberbullied faced concentration difficulties and attendance challenges. Notably, the pandemic-induced reliance on online education further exacerbated cyberbullying exposure.

Cyberbullying Awareness and Response:

The research probes the interplay between cyberbullying awareness and corresponding responses. Impressively, 49% displayed strong agreement with being aware of cyberbullying on the Internet. A parallel to Brochu's (2017) work reveals similar proportions acknowledging cyberbullying's presence. The study demonstrates that university discussions around cyberbullying foster awareness, as 76 (38%) and 54 (27%) strongly agree and agree, respectively, that such conversations transpire in their classes. However, discrepancies are evident in awareness of university policies and Pakistani laws on cyberbullying.

In response to cyberbullying, a multifaceted approach emerges. Respondents express an inclination to confide in loved ones, manifest a fear of judgment in reporting incidents, exhibit a willingness to seek professional assistance and show readiness to report cyberbullying occurrences. The study resonates with Ullah et al.'s (2021) findings on limited cybercrime awareness in Pakistan and its associated risks.

The research underscores students' awareness of existing cyberbullying laws, although underreporting incidents remains prevalent. It highlights the imperative for proactive measures, including victim-oriented workshops and effective implementation of punitive measures. A rejected hypothesis suggests that cyberbullying experiences do not significantly affect the perception of cyberbullying, questioning the applicability of the symbolic interactionism theory. However, participants exhibit increased awareness of cyberbullying in today's digital milieu.

Limitations and Future Research Directions:

The study's findings extend the scholarly discourse on cyberbullying within the Pakistani context, contributing insights into experiences, perceptions, awareness, and responses. It underscores the need for comprehensive measures to address the multifaceted impact of cyberbullying on students' lives.

The study acknowledges its limitations, primarily stemming from the rapidly evolving technological landscape. It calls for further research adopting qualitative or mixed-method approaches to comprehensively explore cyberbullying issues in Pakistan. This entails a deeper understanding beyond quantitative data, as survey-based responses may not fully capture emotions and experiences. Future research could also address limitations in sampling techniques, sample size, and participant diversity. Moreover, extending the scope to encompass male participants would provide a holistic view of gender-related perceptions of cyberbullying. The study emphasizes the growing importance of addressing cyberbullying, particularly within educational institutions. It advocates for increased awareness among children and young adults to foster a safer online environment. Future research endeavors should explore alternative theoretical frameworks and training programs that empower victims to respond effectively to cyberbullying incidents. The findings underscore the need for stringent policies against cyberbullying to prevent its pervasive impact on educational settings.

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