

The Research of Medical Science Review

Received: 04 December, 2024
Accepted: 04 January, 2025
Published: 11 January, 2025

ISSN: 3007-1208 | 3007-1216
Volume 3, Issue 1, 2025

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CYBERBULLYING AND PERSONALITY TRAITS AMONG UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14716021>

ABSTRACT

*The widespread significance and deplorable rise of cyberbullying seriously jeopardizes psychological health, and emotional and physical well-being, particularly within the educational environment in this era. There is a dearth of research on the university population that elucidates the victim experiences from unavoidable cyber incidents. The present research aims to explore the relationship between cyberbullying and personality traits such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism in the context of university students. **Method:** The study employed quantitative methodology and the selected sample was 300 undergraduate students from the age ranges 18 to 29 years selected through convenient sampling techniques from various universities in Lahore. Furthermore, the statistical analysis involved correlation observed the relationship between personality traits measured through the Big Five Inventory Scale (1) and cyberbullying from the Cyberbully/Victim scale (2). **Result:** It was found that extraversion and openness to experience personality traits (E and O) were significantly correlated with cyberbullying in academic settings. Certain personality profiles have a likelihood to become easy targets of cyber harassment. **Conclusion:** The research addresses the need and value of counseling centers on campuses to ensure psychological support services that should be offered to students during cyberbullying situations. The aforementioned factor underlines the crucial role of educational awareness, law enforcement actions, anti-cyberbullying preventive measures, and university policymaking in creating a safer virtual atmosphere for students.*

Keywords: Cyber-bullying/Cyber-victims, Personality Traits, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, University Graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is an ongoing concern that negatively impacts students' mental health and general well-being. The prevalence of such cases is reported higher among universities as compared to schools or colleges (3). The increased demand for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for educational purposes encourages students to openly access social media with liberty (4). Researchers consider cyberbullying to be a mental health concern among all educational sectors. With time, increased involvement of Internet facilities in education has given rise to the spread of cybercrime in the form of cyberbullying or cyber harassment. One study discusses the high prevalence of cyberbullying in a Pakistani university and the data reported that 89.5 % of students faced consequences as cyber victims and 70% identified as involved in cyberbullying which addresses high risks and the need for support groups for the youth generation (5). Study

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reveals cyberbullying to be a serious and alarming threat for students to suffer psychological consequences in the form of stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal harm, loneliness, antisocial behaviors, and other related mental health stressors (6). Also, one study explains cyber victims face adverse traumatic experiences and their influence on personality traits. Openness to experience and conscientiousness were found to be more cyberbullied as compared to other personality traits (7). Therefore, the present study explores the impact of cyberbullying on five personality traits known as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism from Goldberg's theory, 1993. The five personality traits are discussed in the context of university students who suffer psychological harm from cyberbullying.

Methods

The present study was a correlational research design. The study was employed after approval from the Institute Review Board of Committee (IRB) and the research time duration was June 2020 and May 2021. A convenient sampling technique was initiated on 300 university participants, including age groups 18 to 29 years from multiple universities in Lahore. Online survey methods were used which included demographic information of age, gender, family income, education, and university sector. The ethical guidelines were discussed under study along with informed consent and measurement tools. The personality traits were measured from the validated Big Five personality inventory scale BFI-44 including five subscales openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. The scale comprises 44 items including 5-point Likert statements from strongly agree to disagree. Similarly, cyberbullying was reported and measured through the cyberbully/victim scale by Mehmet (1). Five-point Likert scale was incorporated that consisted of 19 items ranging from always to never statements. The procedure involved online self-report questionnaires distributed through the use of social media via WhatsApp groups. The researcher requested university lecturers and students to share their study groups. Online Google forms included the purpose of the study, ethical instructions, demographic backgrounds, and variable measurement tools. The researcher ensured the anonymity of participants, and a chance to withdraw at any stage, and provided a personal email ID to contact for counseling support.

Results

The study was proposed to investigate the cyberbullying impact on personality traits, such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism among university students.

Table 1

Description of Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 300)

Variable	Frequency (F)	Percentile (%)
Gender		
Men	145	48
Women	155	52
Education		
B. A	29	9.7
B.Sc.	166	85.5
M.A	23	7.7
M.Phil.	61	23.3
Others	21	7.0
University Sector		
Private	158	53
Public	142	47

Table 1 showed a brief description of the demographic variables of the study sample which indicated that the sample included the mean age of participants was 22.82 and the standard deviation was (2.72), whereas the majority was women (52 %). The educational level of most of the participants was B.Sc. students (85.5 %) and 7 percent of the participants were medical students. The majority of participants

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reported being from private universities (53 %) through different platforms, such as WhatsApp, facebook, google, and Instagram.

Table 2

Correlation of Big Five Inventory Scores and Cyberbully/Victim Scale (N = 300)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CBV	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
2. BFI	-.08	----	----	----	----	----	----
3. BFlextro	.14*	.48**	----	----	----	----	----
4. BFIagreeabl	-.21	.33**	-.15**	----	----	----	----
5. BFIconschi	.07	.35**	.11*	-.17**	----	----	----
6. BFIneuro	-.04	.44**	.17**	.04	.10	----	----
7. BFIopen	-.20**	.75**	.19**	.21**	-.01	.13*	----
M	56.24	126.10	22.43	26.31	26.68	22.60	28.81
(SD)	(26.05)	(8.63)	(2.68)	(2.85)	(2.69)	(3.10)	(4.35)

Note. BFI=Big Five Inventory scale, BFIEXTR=Big Five Inventory Extroversion, BFIAGREE=Big Five Inventory Agreeableness, BFICONS=Big Five Inventory Conscientiousness, BFINEURO=Big Five Inventory Neuroticism, BFIOPEN=Big Five Inventory openness to Experience, and CBV=Cyber Bully/Victim scale, * $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2 indicates a significant positive correlation between CBV, BFlextro, and BFIopen, while a negative relationship is observed with BFIagreeabl and BFIneuro. This negative relationship suggests that these personality traits are less influenced by cyberbullying behavior. It was also reported that there was a strong relationship between the FBI and its subscales.

Table 3

Gender Differences Mean and Standard Deviation of the Variables of the Study (N= 300)

Variable	Men	Women	t	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M (SD)			UL	LL
CBV	64.15 (24.84)	48.83 (25.04)	5.31	.00*	9.64	20.98
BFI	126.05 (8.50)	126.15 (8.78)	-1.00	.92	-2.06	1.87
BFI-Agree	26.28 (2.87)	26.33 (2.84)	-.16	.88	-.70	.59
BFI-Cons	26.64 (0.24)	26.72 (2.44)	-.28	.78	-.70	.52
BFI-Neuro	22.55 (2.85)	22.65 (3.32)	-.26	.79	-.79	.61
BFI-Open	28.68 (4.38)	28.92 (4.34)	-.49	.63	-1.23	.74
BFI-Extro	22.45 (2.80)	22.41 (2.57)	.137	.89	-.56	.65

Table 3 illustrates the mean and standard deviation of the male and female participants with study variables. The mean score and standard deviation for cyberbullying were (M=64.15, SD= 24.84) for men and the women's score was (M=48.83, SD=25.04) which indicates that men were facing higher levels of cyberbullying ($p < 0.05$). The personality traits did not show any significant gender differences across its domains.

Discussion

The study examined university students who are being bullied online and face adverse effects of psychological signs and symptoms with poor academic performance. It was reported in previous research that 80 % of students were victims and had clinical manifestations. The online mode of transmission of cybercrime was often from WhatsApp and other such social media (8). Similarly, university students in

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Dubai reported 92 percent significance of cyberspace harassment. Victims of cyberbullying are 70 % from Instagram and 50% from Facebook (9, 10, 11). Students from Chinese universities who were selected for the prediction of personality traits were more disturbed by cyberbullying. The agreeableness and neuroticism showed significance among both genders i.e. men and women. Neuroticism personality trait was found to be highly associated with cyber victims and needed careful attention if dealing with cyber hostile harassment (12, 13, 14). Another study from Turkey University discusses the relationship between personality traits and cyberbullying among students. It was explored that individuals with neuroticism personalities have the weakest traits in coping with cyber-related issues (15, 16, 17). A study conducted at the University of Spain identified conscientiousness personality traits are more engaged in studious tasks and completion of projects for which they are mostly using social websites for their reference of study. They showed the high risk of facing the consequences of cyberbullying. The study emphasized, that students who get more access to virtual facilities suffer consequences from cyberspace (18). Cyberbullying plays a key role in the increase of mental health concerns in universities and influences personality traits that are triggered under pressure or a hostile culture of cyber harassment. One study relates cyber violence has negative effects on students seeking higher education. The individuals who lack the information and awareness of cybercrimes and online violence are more victims. The need for awareness should be promoted in educational settings to create a safer environment of learning and to build confidence in students to report anti-cyberbullying committee (19). The conducted study addresses some limitations of the drawn conclusion. As the research study was cross-sectional, the variables under study and their relationship were not explained in depth according to the theoretical framework. Similarly, the sample size of the study was not massive due to which it could not be generalized to the larger population. In data gathering and interpreting, many loopholes need to be highlighted which further explain the types of personality traits and its tendency toward cyber victimization. Cyberbullying has adverse effects on the student's educational life. Therefore, the study effectively promotes positive climates for university scholars to study without any fear of being cyberbullied or intentionally forced to be victims of cyber-related emotional harm. Students should be given the confidence to report to ethical management to deal with any kind of harassment (20).

The findings underscore the pressing need for increased awareness and proactive measures to address cyberbullying in educational settings. In Asian culture, lack of awareness and not reporting to the ethical committee of the university, contribute to various cybercrimes. And this non-reporting behavior leads to several other menaces in society that could give birth to a bigger problem. Many university students are not even aware of dealing with cyber-related harassment and little effort is observed to seek help from experts of anti-cyber agencies. Therefore, youth need proper guidance in the usage of technology, and imitations or barriers need to be addressed to prevent the fear and mistrust of becoming a victim of cyber harassment (20).

Conclusion: By understanding the link between personality traits and susceptibility to cyberbullying, universities can implement targeted interventions to support students and mitigate its negative impact on their well-being and learning.

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